

The

New Missioner



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THE NEW MISSIONER







She was a slender black-robed woman

THE NEW MISSIONER

BY

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ILLUSTRATIONS

| | FACING PAGE |
|--|----------------|
| SHE WAS A SLENDER BLACK-ROBED WOMAN | |
| <i>Frontispiece</i> | |
| STANDING IN THE CENTRE OF THE GROUP SHE SPOKE DIRECTLY AND MENACINGLY TO FRANCES | 12 |
| SHE TURNED TO MRS. EVANS WITH A PLEADING EMBARRASSMENT OF MANNER | 96 |
| “HELLO, GIRLS,” HE ANSWERED HEARTILY . . | 134 |
| IT WAS MYRTLE WHO WOULD INNOCENTLY MEET HIM | 144 |
| BEFORE THE GIPSY’S DOOR STOOD TWO SHAGGY BURROS | 206 |
| FOR A LONG TIME THEY SAT IN SILENCE . . | 234 |
| “LISTEN, MR. CAMPBELL ” | 266 |

THE NEW MISSIONER

CHAPTER ONE

I SAW the New Missioner get off the train at the station this morning," said Garvin to Lutie. "I thought you told me that Mrs. Nitschkan and her crowd had driven her away for good."

"The New Missioner back!" cried Lutie, her wan little face flushing with excitement. "Ain't you mistaken, Walt?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Garvin. "I drove up on the hack with her, saw her get off at the Thorn House, and heard her tell Mrs. Thorn she was back for good."

"I bet you a dollar that she don't stay," affirmed Lutie. "Mis' Nitschkan and her crowd won't have it."

"I bet you twenty-five that she does stay," said the millionaire of Zenith, laying down his book and speaking with earnestness and emphasis. "I had a good look at her this afternoon. Put your money up, Lutie, here's mine."

"All right," responded Lutie, with alacrity. "But if she's sure back, we'll have some fun, for I'm tellin' you, Walt, Mis' Nitschkan an' her friends won't have her. They say they don't want no woman missionary nosin' around this camp. Mis' Thomas said yesterday that it was a matter of principle with 'em; that they didn't believe it was possible for a woman to bring the

THE NEW MISSIONER

tidings of salvation. I'll bet you the fun'll begin to-morrow, Walt."

"Shouldn't wonder," he returned absently.

Lutie's surmise was quite correct. Surely, never before in the history of Zenith had the advent of a quiet, rather insignificant woman created so much discussion. Yet fully to realise the importance of the situation, one must understand that Zenith, largely by virtue of geographical conditions, was almost entirely dependent upon her own resources for interest and excitement.

It was a mining village in the very heart of the Rockies, nestling in eternal beauty, and surrounded by chill, snow-crowned peaks, and yet, if one might judge from appearances, sordidly indifferent to the grandeur of its environment.

It was to this remote spot that the Bishop of the diocese that included Zenith, had sent Frances Benson, or, as she was speedily and currently dubbed, "The New Missioner."

Now the Bishop was benign and worldly as well as spiritually wise, and consequently he had asked her, perplexedly, whimsically, and a little sorrowfully, to go to this especial field.

"I hope you won't reproach me later," he said apologetically, "but you have sown such effective seed on such unpromising rocks before—and er—have shown such a genius for your work, that—— Well, to tell the truth,"—in a burst of confidence,—“you are

CHAPTER ONE

the only material I have that may"—doubtfully—"prevail."

She had looked at him with something like laughter in her eyes and expressed her complete willingness to undertake the work at once. Conscious of her powers, she loved to test them. The Bishop evidently regarded Zenith as a most difficult problem; so difficult that he would intrust it to no one but her. Her heart rose in pride and gratitude. She loved difficult problems.

And she had gone, and she had liked Zenith. She was one of those whose strength cometh from the hills; and among the pines, the splendid shining peaks, where the air is blown crystal clear, there seemed to descend upon her spirit, worn by the routine of monotonous days, the calm and healing of silence.

She felt new tides of an almost electrical energy flowing to her; and her stimulated brain constantly devised fresh plans for ennobling and vivifying the stagnant village life. But from the first she was conscious of some strong, baffling force which invariably turned the current of sentiment against her most cherished views and plans. By patient observation she grew to know that the force that balked her so effectively was feminine.

Assured of the correctness of her surmise, Frances was too astute to jeopard her position by any false moves; so, after due inward cogitation, she decided upon a masterly inactivity, a withdrawal into the wilderness, as it were.

Consequently she departed, and the combating powers

THE NEW MISSIONER

of Zenith believed and jubilantly announced that she would not return.

In this they erred. She not only returned, but started out the morning after her arrival with the very definite end in view of forcing the issue.

Although it was nearly ten o'clock as she walked through the one straggling village street, the sun was just beginning to peep over the peaks. But that had not retarded the day's activities. The miners had followed the trails upward through the pines two hours before; the children were all in school as the last tap of the cracked bell in the small schoolhouse belfry proclaimed, and this was the hour when the women invited their souls with a brief interlude of stimulating gossip across front gates or over side fences.

This morning the conversation with Frances for a topic had been indefinitely prolonged, and, as in many such cases, discussion had degenerated into acrimonious argument. Frances, however, had succeeded in appearing oblivious to the unrepressed comments upon her personal appearance and her calling, as she walked through the one street Zenith could boast.

She was a slender, black-robed woman, with a square, determined face, heavy, dark hair and the large, far-away eyes of the mystic. Hers was a face which in repose was strong and plain; but when lighted by a smile the soft and very feminine mouth took curves of an appealing sweetness, and even coquetry, which captured the beholder with the sudden charm of the unexpected.

Frances Benson had been born of the lower classes

CHAPTER ONE

of a great city, and had begun life as a waif in the stream of the world. With aspiring energy she had caught at straws and spars and struggled ashore. She had managed, none knew how, to secure an ordinary education, and at sixteen was "in business"; but although commended for her diligence, she was unsatisfied. The hand and the brain she kept occupied; but the heart remained untouched, because the keynotes had never been sounded. But finally it vibrated, then rang true to the minor chords, the wail of distress; the cry of thousands.

She had followed this cry to the slums of cities, to the factories, and the mines; had worked side by side with the labourers, lived their lives, made their necessities hers. In comforting, managing, nursing and sometimes preaching, she found not only solace, but scope for her powers. The side which drew upon her executive ability also appealed to her imagination and to her longing to spend herself and be spent; and the composure, the self-restraint that she had acquired through those years of training stood her in good stead now, for there was no hint of inward perturbation as, the apparently unconscious cynosure of many eyes, she opened the gate and walked up the untidy path to a cabin which stood somewhat apart from the neighbouring dwellings.

There are certain houses which wear a distinct expression; which have, as it were, attained a physiognomy. This cabin was one of them, and its aspect, heedless, rakish and devil-may-care, was accentuated by its

THE NEW MISSIONER

leaning chimneys and the litter of tin cans and broken washtubs in the disorderly yard.

At the Missionary's first low knock on the door there was the faint flutter of a window curtain as if an eye had been applied and hastily withdrawn. Then the door was thrown wide, and the mistress of the cabin stood upon the threshold.

She was a type to whom hardihood is a birthright. A short, stout figure in a brief cotton skirt which freely disclosed a man's boots; she stood Napoleonic and alien among her kind. A man's coat was buttoned across her burly chest, and her scant curly brown hair was pushed under a man's soft hat thrust back on her head. Small alert blue eyes twinkled in a weather-beaten red face, and her smile displayed two faultless rows of tiny teeth as white as a squirrel's.

She did not ape masculinity in the least; but merely wrapped herself in it as a garment, and remained the freebooting Amazon, unconsciously exulting in the possession of two sets of weapons—those she had appropriated from man and those of her own sex.

For a moment she surveyed Frances, and then threw the door wider open.

"Come in, won't you, Missioner," bowing with ironical and punctilious courtesy. "Us ladies is jus' a-sittin' here, chattin'. Choose yer chair, Missioner. I guess you know the ladies present."

The women referred to occupied chairs drawn close to the stove, and were to all appearances enjoying the refreshment of both tea and coffee. Behold the redoubt-

CHAPTER ONE

able Mrs. Evans sitting among her prime ministers—a tiny, black-eyed creature to whom the languors of her larger sisters were foreign. She alone had selected a straight chair, and now sat rigidly erect, her arms folded defiantly across her chest and her feet barely touching the floor.

Mrs. Thomas, on the other hand, was a tall, stout beauty, with the appearance of a Norse giantess and the appealing, kittenish manners and baby lisp which seem to be the especial temptation of the Venus Colossal. Mrs. Landvetter was a flat-faced German, large of build and of tremendous physical strength.

After the first cold greeting accorded Frances, no word was spoken. The four women among whom she sat rocked slowly back and forth, gazing fixedly at the stove, an expression of deprecatory meekness on their faces. One would almost have said that they purred. Their lids were drooped, but in their eyes was that peculiar glisten seen in those of a panther on guard.

Their silence covered the swift buckling on of armour, the marshalling of forces, the preparation for the subtlest, most merciless conflict on earth—the warfare of women, a warfare ungoverned by codes of honour or rules of the game. The combat of men is as the sport of children in comparison; it defines itself in hot words, the swift, material vengeance of pistol or knife, a fight in the open.

In her battles with man, woman uses the powerful arms of fascination, appeal, tears, and weakness; but in the struggle of woman against woman such wooden

THE NEW MISSIONER

swords and paper shields are cast aside, useless toys in that warfare of strategy and ambush which employs poisoned arrows and the stiletto, so handled that the wounds bleed inwardly and show no trace.

In those brief moments of waiting the lines on the Missionary's face deepened, and the strength of her face became more apparent, even a certain vulgarity. She had mentally reverted to the frays of her childhood, and felt herself again the hair-pulling, kicking imp of the slums, shrilling coarse innuendo at her foes. The lady she had striven to make herself slipped from her as the husk from a kernel, and, like her sisters among whom she sat, she was a primitive cave-woman, stripped of all of civilisation's hard-won graces, save only self-control.

As it became evident that she had no intention of making the first move, the members of the opposition began to fidget somewhat uneasily in their chairs and glance furtively at one another. Presently Mrs. Landvetter's deep voice broke the protracted silence.

"I vas a-tellin' you about dat lace of mine in de pineapple pattern, vasn't I, Mis' Thomas?" she inquired innocently. "Oh, it vas fine; von foot so vide. I lef' it on my dresser von morgen und py afternoon it vas gone."

Before Mrs. Thomas could properly condole with her friend upon this much discussed loss, Miss Benson's voice broke in clearly: "I have heard of that lace so often," she remarked coldly, "that I talked the matter over with the Bishop last week, and we resolved that if it

CHAPTER ONE

was not soon recovered, a court of law should investigate its disappearance."

This rapid return-fire was so unexpected that the enemy was temporarily thrown into confusion. An awed pause ensued, and Mrs. Landvetter, to cover her embarrassment, arose and, lifting the coffee-pot with fine nonchalance, poured her cup so full that it brimmed over and ran down into the saucer in streaky rivulets.

But a Thomas to the rescue! "I s'pose you ain't been long enough in Zenith, Miss Benson," addressing the Missionary with suave and considerate interest, "to catch on to the way the boys feel about havin' a woman preacher. It'll be pretty hard fer you right along. One of the boys was a-sayin' to me to-day, he says——"

The steel of Frances Benson flashed in the air and stabbed squarely. "I suspect it was the same one that told me he was glad of the change," she said trenchantly. "He thought his grocery bills might go down, now that his wife couldn't invite the preacher in for every meal."

Mrs. Thomas fell back from the impact of the blow, but rallied hastily and fainted to gain time. She became suddenly absorbed in the contemplation of her empty cup, gazing at it with astonished incredulity, even turning it sidewise toward the light and squinting at it as a connoisseur of art might view some rare treasure.

"Why, Mis' Nitschkan," she murmured perplexedly, "I do declare, ef my cup ain't plum empty! I'll thank you fer another cup of tea."

The gipsy of the wilds, the hardy denizen of mining camps, sprang to her feet and squared her shoulders

THE NEW MISSIONER

determinedly while she served her friend with a brew as strong as lye. She had made her obeisance to etiquette, and had allowed her guests the opportunity of drawing first blood. Now she meant to take command of the field herself.

"I tell you what, Missioner," she said bluntly, "they make it awful hot here fer folks they don't like; an' us girls ain't so bad at that game, either. Girls, you remember that book-agent, an' also that schoolmarm that we got rid of?"

Standing in the centre of the group she spoke directly and menacingly to Frances.

"That book-agent, she come here day after day, always with that 'Famous Women' series under her arm; but I fixed her at last. 'Mis' Tompkins,' I says, real polite, 'put your books down on that chair, an' come into the front room while I give you a cup of coffee.' 'All right,' she says, an' lays down her books. Well, I got her in the easy chair in the front room, with the photograph album to look at, an' then I run back fer a cup. Celia was a-settin' there on the kitchen floor; she was just about three then. Well, I reached her a jug of molasses an' I says, 'Celia, paint the pretty book.' An' Celia did. Oh, how that Tompkins took on when she seen it!"

She bent herself double in paroxysms of laughter, which were ably echoed by her guests, with the exception of the missionary, who made no attempt to conceal her cold scorn.

"I jus' raised myself like this, an' looked her in the



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and menacingly to Frances*

CHAPTER ONE

eye, an' says as cold, 'You lef' them books at your own resk; now try an' make me pay fer 'em ef you dare!' An', girls, she jus' slunk out.

"An'," continued Mrs. Nitschkan, stimulated by her success, and still gasping with laughter, "you remember that schoolteacher—nasty, stuck-up thing—I couldn't stand her from the first! No more could you, Mis' Evans; nor you, Mis' Thomas. So I told Celia to cut up as many monkey tricks as she pleased at school. Well, one day she come home cryin'. 'Mommy,' she says, 'I can't go back to school no more. Teacher, she's expended me, 'cause I'm so bad.'

"'She did, did she?' I says. 'I'd like to see her deprive any child of mine of learnin',' an' I marched straight off to the schoolhouse. 'What do you mean,' I says, 'by drivin' my child away from school? I s'pose you want her to be as ignorant as you think her mommy is; but I'll show you a thing or two!' With that she begun to cry. 'Oh,' she says, 'I'm a-goin' to leave this cruel, wicked place!' 'That's right,' I says, 'an' I'll advise you to leave quick.'"

She concluded with a great burst of mirth, in which the rocking women joined, now easing and again breaking out into fresh chuckles. Then, tightening her lips, she nodded directly and threateningly at the missionary, as if to say, "You've heard me; take the lesson home." The rocking women caught their breaths in delight and admiration.

There was one quick heave of Frances Benson's bosom, and then she slowly lifted her head, her eyes fixed un-

THE NEW MISSIONER

waveringly upon those of the burly mountain lioness—no longer the unseeing orbs of the mystic, full of strange visions, but the cold, quick eyes of the shrewd organiser, alight with exultant power. Her voice rang high, almost shrill.

“What was the name of this teacher, Mrs. *O'Donnell*—I mean Nitschkan?” Steadily, mercilessly, she held her tormentor's eyes while the gipsy gazed at her as if fascinated. Thus challenged, Mrs. Nitschkan's face went white, her lids drooped, and her defiant figure grew limp and nerveless; but the missionary was implacable. “Strange that I should have used that name!” she ruminated. “It belonged to a man I used to know in Arizona, and met in Denver a week ago. He was searching for some trace of the wife who had deserted him several years back, taking with her his watch and five hundred dollars in money. He has never divorced her!”

The breath that broke from Mrs. Nitschkan's lips was almost a sob. Forgetful of the friends who scanned her with quick, curious glances, she stood perfectly still, twisting the corner of her apron and gazing with drooping mouth and hunted eyes about the cheerful room—her home—*hers!* Her gaze roved about the walls and out through the window where the towheads of her children shone in the sunlight. For a moment she heaved and trembled, and then the fire came back to her eyes. She straightened, stiffened, and sprang at the missionary, seizing her by the shoulders and shaking her back and forth.

CHAPTER ONE

“You’d come here with your lyin’ tales, would you?” she screamed hoarsely. “You’d come here an’ try an’ take my husband an’ children away from me? That’s what you’re up to! But I’m a-goin’ to kill you! That’s what I’m a-goin’ to do—kill you! Wring the neck of you like you was a chicken, which you are! You skinny monkey, you want to get me out of the way so you can have my man an’ my children. You’ve been after him a’ready!”

The Missionary struck the mountain woman across the face. “You’re a liar!” cried the daughter of the slums. There ensued a moment of fierce tussle, while the onlookers collapsed in hysterics, with the exception of tiny Mrs. Evans. That intrepid soul hurled herself into the fray, and, seizing Mrs. Nitschkan by the arm, dragged her around.

“Are you crazy?” she cried. “Fer God’s sake, stop poundin’ her! Darn you, Nitschkan, don’t you know us ladies is got some social position to keep up? Now stop it, I say! Missioner ain’t goin’ to say nothin’ outside if we fall in with her; are you, Mis’ Benson?”

The missionary fell back against the wall, pale, bruised, trembling, but with “no capitulation” written on every line of her face and figure.

“No,” she gasped; “I’ll never tell as long as you’re willing to help me in the Lord’s work.”

“Now, you hear that, Mis’ Nitschkan, an’ all you ladies,” crisped the decisive Evans. “We’re a-goin’ to consider everything unsaid, an’ all unpleasantness over. Here, Nitschkan, set in this chair an’ pull yourself to-

THE NEW MISSIONER

gether while I rustle around fer fresh tea. Mis' Thomas, get Miss Benson a clean cup."

For a moment or two Mrs. Nitschkan cowered in her chair, pulling with trembling fingers at her torn coat sleeve. Then, throwing her apron over her head, she broke into wild sobbing, which alternated with a rasping and mirthless laughter.

"The 'strikes,' " said Mrs. Evans composedly, pouring boiling water into the teapot. "It'll be a relief fer her; jes' let her be."

"How'd ever we poor women bear our lives if it wasn't fer 'em?" murmured Mrs. Thomas. "Lay off your hat, Miss Benson," she continued, in a voice which was as oil. "How's your health, now? If you've ever had anything wrong with your lungs, this is just the place fer 'em. If it's your liver, well, I'd say a cup of sage tea night an' mornin'. Oh, you got your hand tore, didn't you? Why, it's a real bad scratch. Let me rub in a little 'Rocky Mountain' salve—do."

But the missionary seemed not to hear her. She, too, had fallen into a chair, and sat staring before her with a white face and staring eyes.

"I came to Zenith to try and help," she stammered, "but I——"

"That's right, to try an' help. Well, woman dear, what else are we on earth for? To do for others, I say."

Mrs. Nitschkan, despite her dishevelled appearance, had quite recovered herself, and was even more desirous than her sisters of ignoring the past.

CHAPTER ONE

Frances Benson struggled to her feet. "I can't stay, unless you ladies really want to help me." She stood leaning weakly against the door, her face white and deadly fatigued; but her eyes steady, no hint of failing purpose in them. "Will you help?"

"Well I guess yes," said Mrs. Nitschkan heartily, speaking for all. "You can depend on us, Miss Benson, now an' hereafter. Ain't it so, girls?"

"You bet!" returned Mrs. Evans with even more decision. "Marthy Thomas, pour the Missioner a nice, hot cup of coffee."

CHAPTER TWO

ALL that afternoon Frances Benson sat in her room in the Thorn House, the mountain hotel to which she had been directed by the Bishop before her arrival in Zenith, and where, since the tenure of her stay seemed so uncertain, she had since remained.

It was a bare, uncarpeted little room, with two small windows framing magnificent pictures of the narrow plain and the towering mountains beyond; a comfortless chamber with a few pieces of pine furniture which gave evidence of long and hard usage. So illy put together were the rough board partitions separating the rooms, that it seemed to Frances that by night or day she was never able to secure the privacy for which she longed. About her there were always footfalls and voices, laughter and oaths. She was coughing constantly from the tobacco smoke which floated through the cracks in the walls and wavered in long, blue lines across the room. It was only when out upon the hill-sides that she ever felt herself alone.

Longing for peace and silence, bruised in body and soul, she had returned to the inn after the scene at Mrs. Nitschkan's, and, unheeding the raucous summons of the dinner bell, had slowly dragged herself up the stairs to the unquiet chamber. For an hour or two she had sat there, one arm flung over the table and head bent upon

CHAPTER TWO

it, dully conscious of a bodily ache and of the black waves of depression which rose rhythmically, monotonously, like the sullen waters of an incoming tide, and swept over her soul, engulfing its hope and quenching its light.

All the tense force, the poise, the courage, expressed in every line and pose of her body was gone. It was as if the spirit had withdrawn itself and left only the nerveless, crumpled, unstable flesh. At last she lifted her head and looked dejectedly, almost dazedly, about her.

"I didn't meet it right," she murmured; "I didn't meet it right. I put myself on their level. There didn't seem to be any other way; but there must have been—only I didn't have light enough to see it. Yes, there must have been another way, but I'm so weak——"

She drew toward her a Bible on the table, and, opening it, bent above it, her pale cheek leaning on her hand. Thus she read until the room had so filled with shadows that she could not discern the words, then soothed and calmed, she arose to light the lamp. Sad still, but with regained poise, she was able to review the situation. If she was incapable yet of rejoicing, she at least found relief in the thought that one question was definitely decided: she was to stay in Zenith, and she did not have to confess defeat to the Bishop.

But the lamp chimney she was adjusting almost fell from her hands, for she was startled by a quick knock upon the door, and the landlady's daughter, without waiting to be bidden, announced two visitors, Mr. Herries and Mr. Campbell.

THE NEW MISSIONER

Upon Frances's request that they enter, there appeared two old men, whom she remembered to have seen in the little church on one or two previous Sundays. The first to come forward from the gloom of the doorway was Herries, a tall, bowed figure with a keen, aquiline, intellectual face, and a quantity of snowy hair which fell across his brow. His clumsy, patched boots and rough clothes betrayed his poverty, while his seamed, twisted hands bespoke the hardest toil. Close behind him followed Campbell, a withered stump of a man, who crouched, a huddled little figure in the chair Frances offered him, his feet failing to touch the floor by an inch or two. He did not speak, even in answer to her greeting, but watched her every movement with strange, wild eyes peering from a mat of tangled whiskers and grey hair.

"We have come," said Herries, with a certain unctuous formality, a sort of solemn hilarity, "to congratulate you upon your victory." There was a sardonic gleam of excitement in his piercing blue eyes.

"Amen!" It was one deep, fervent note, rich, vibrating, resonant, like the mellow tone of a bell, from the little man at his side. "We have heard that you have this day been given the grace to vanquish the hosts of the Egyptians which have been arrayed against you."

Frances flushed to the roots of her hair.

"Why—why——" she stammered helplessly. "Who knew——"

Alexander Herries laughed discordantly. "Who knew?"—his speech as well as that of Campbell was

CHAPTER TWO

marked by a strong Scotch accent—"who knew? The hills, the trees, the very rocks. If you breathe in Zenith, it is known. You have always lived in cities where you get to know the things that happen. Go to the wilderness to know yourself. Strange shapes will rise and mock you, yourself, yourself, always yourself—a thousand selves you never dreamed of; but come to the little, hidden villages to know men and women—aye, and you will read a sorry tale!" He mused a moment, his face grown bitter. "Yes," his voice changing, "a good many of the boys are broke to-night on account of you, Missioner—the betting was all against you; but there isn't one of them that's not taking off his hat to you, now. You were supposed to pack up and clear out to-night. The Aid Society had spoken." The habitual sneer on his crooked mouth deepened.

"The Aid Society!" she repeated uncomprehendingly.

"So. The Ladies' Aid Society of Zenith. One of the kitchens in hell where considerable broth is brewed. Is it not so, Campbell?"

"Aye." Again the mellow note boomed from the huddled figure beside him.

Frances sat for a moment in painful embarrassment. She had no wish to discuss the events of the day.

"Wasn't it your cabin I saw a day or two ago, on Corona mountain?" she asked Campbell, in an endeavour to draw him into the conversation and change the subject; but although she spoke directly to him, she saw at once that his thoughts were far away. His

THE NEW MISSIONER

eyes were clear and apparently returning her gaze; but the clearness seemed only of the surface; behind, it was as if a veil had fallen.

"No," replied Herries, speaking for him. "He lives with Mrs. Landvetter—Mrs. Landvetter, about whose neck ye have put a halter." He laughed in harsh glee. "He has strange powers, has the little man. With a bit of wire in one hand and certain numbers that he can use, he can locate ore. 'Tis true," nodding; "I have seen him do it more than once. And he has a strange knowledge of things unseen. Some call him mad. Oh,"—carelessly, seeing her embarrassment,—"he does not hear you."

There was nothing superstitious in Frances Benson's nature, and yet, as she sat in the dimly lighted room with the two old men, the one with his clear, unseeing eyes, the other, sardonic, mocking, and strong, a man of passions and prejudices, she was conscious of a faint awe, a creeping chill.

But as she turned her gaze from one to the other, Campbell's face changed, he passed his hand across his eyes and looked at Frances with a kindly and intimate scrutiny.

"Ruth likes her," he said simply, addressing Herries. "She says——" He broke off and listened intently, his eyes again becoming veiled.

"He means his wife," explained Herries. "She's been dead ten years. He thinks she's with him much of the time. He had a cabin in Pepper Gulch. People had been living there for fifty years, when in a February

CHAPTER TWO

there was a thaw and then a sudden freshet, and before they knew it the flood was upon them, the cabin was swept away and his wife and son were drowned. By some miracle he was saved."

He spoke as freely as before, quite as if Campbell were not in the room, and Frances, glancing apprehensively at the old visionary, saw that he had again journeyed to his far country.

But before she could avert her glance he had returned to the mundane.

"Do you feel the spirit of the mountains?" he asked her. "Was it that which drew you here?"

"The spirit of the mountains," she repeated, "the spirit of the mountains?" But she echoed his question mechanically and with her lips. His words vibrated all through her consciousness, as if some unknown chord of her being had been struck and awakened to music. She looked at him with quick response. With this mad, old man one could—nay must—speak soul to soul; he permitted no other speech.

"When the train rolled through the plains," she went on eagerly, the fetters of her habitual self-restraint falling from her, "I seemed to be waiting, waiting. I had never been in the mountains before."

She stopped in the full tide of her eagerness. She forgot to speak. The mental impression transcended words. She saw again those narrow gorges up which the engine drawing the train had slowly panted, higher, higher, always higher, the way ever growing darker; great rocks overhung the road and were flung about in

THE NEW MISSIONER

strange shapes. A dark, terrible region, haunted by hideous dreams of avarice and sordid seeking. She shivered. Then came the narrow plains and rocky hills, and suddenly she lifted her head, her eyes dilating—the blue ranges and the white, awful peaks.

“And ye heard the message?” he asked again, insistent, inexorable.

“The message?” she whispered. Her mouth quivered, the words seemed drawn from unsounded depths of her nature: “‘Behold I show you a mystery’”—her scarcely audible speech was broken by pauses—“‘a new heaven and a new earth.’”

“Aye. You were drawn,”—one deep note of satisfaction. “So was Ethel. Do you know Ethel?”

“Ethel?” she repeated, vaguely startled by the thought that he might again be referring to a friend in that strange world whose boundaries he passed so easily. “Ah,” in quick recollection, “do you mean the Salvation Army girl who spoke to me one Sunday night after church? She said that her name was Ethel.” She remembered a slender girl with a pale, pretty face, big grey eyes and a cleft, scarlet mouth. The bonnet of the Army covered her ashen, fair hair.

“The same,” muttered Herries, nodding his head and speaking with some pride. “She was a brand the little man snatched from the burning. Mad or sane, he saved Ethel. One night when he was down at the Springs he felt moved to preach in the streets,—he often does,—and Ethel, who was passing in her silks and satins with the paint thick upon her face, stopped to listen.”

CHAPTER TWO

"I saw her," Campbell cried; "maybe there were others, but I saw only her, and the Word came to me strong and terrible. 'This night thou shalt demand her soul, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against thee.' And I spoke to her the Word as it was given me, and she listened. Then I saw the Fiend in visible form come from the shadows and pluck at her elbow and whisper in her ear; and I groaned, for I thought I should have to fight long and hard; but the Word came: 'Stand thou still and see the salvation of the Lord!' And I spoke no more; but she ran to me, and knelt at my feet and her tears poured down her cheeks. After that she tarried no longer by the rivers of Babylon; she came here and joined the Army."

"Yes," said Herries, nodding his head affirmatively, "that's so. Some thinks him mad; but mad or sane, he saved Ethel. But, Missioner, we must keep you no longer. Rise, Campbell, we must go."

An idea, she regarded it afterwards as an inspiration, came to Frances as she sat there. "Wait one moment. I want to ask you something," she exclaimed, impulsively following them to the door. "Do either of you know where I can get a little cabin to live in? There is so much noise and confusion here in the hotel, and now"—with one of her quick smiles—"that I am going to remain here, I want a place of my own."

Herries pondered a moment with lower jaw pushed forward. "There is a cabin of Garvin's on Corona about a quarter of a mile below mine. It's empty now, and he might rent it to you."

THE NEW MISSIONER

"On Corona!" delightedly. "I should like that. Who is Mr. Garvin, and where can I find him?"

"Walt Garvin," said Herries, "is the biggest mine owner in these parts——"

"An unbeliever!" said Campbell.

Herries twisted his mouth. "The biggest mine owner in these parts. He owns the Crescent Consolidated, the Mont d'Or, the Gold Bug and half a dozen others. He struck it rich about five years ago; and he's a white fellow. I'll show you where he lives." He walked over to the narrow-paned window. "Do you see those lights twinkling yonder on the flat?" he asked, pointing with one great, rugged forefinger.

"Yes."

"Well, that's his house."

"His palace," came the arresting, accusing, stern tones of Campbell; "the palace that he built for his light-o'-love."

CHAPTER THREE

FRANCES paid no heed to Campbell's last words, scarcely heard them, in fact. Her mind was too fully occupied with the thought of a cabin on Corona—a little home among the hills. The idea was so attractive to her, the mental picture it presented so pleasing, that she resolved to see Garvin about the matter early the next morning; but upon inquiry as to the best time to find him at home, she learned that he was usually early at his mines or mills and would probably be occupied at one place or another until late in the afternoon, so that it was nearing sunset on the following day before she started on her mission.

Leaving the Thorn House, she walked down Sunshine Avenue, the poetic name of the mountain road which served also as the one street of the straggling village. After ceasing to be an avenue the road continued for about a quarter of a mile through lush brown meadows, and ran across a little bridge over a creek which separated the higher flat from the waste land.

In spite of her eagerness to secure a cabin on Corona, Frances paused on the bridge nevertheless and, leaning upon the rail, watched the fast flowing waters of the mountain stream. So clear was it that she could count the pebbles in the narrow channel where the water ran. On either side of this rippling tide were several feet of ice, thin and crinkled, and jutting out over the water in

THE NEW MISSIONER

sharp, broken points and arrowy spars. Along the banks were clumps of willows, whose long yellow-ochre wands were beginning to look alive, to swell and ripple with faint, tremulous undulations, ready to burst in a day, in an hour, into their tender, grey-green leaves. Frances drew in long breaths of the indescribably pure air. There was Spring in it, Spring with all its rapturous promises, its high, ethereal ecstasy. She longed to linger there; reluctantly, she turned her face westward, toward her destination, and paused again, arrested.

The "flat" stretched before her straight and level for a short distance, and ended in a growth of pines which rose tier on tier up a mountain side, regular, solemn, mysterious, and beyond them, through a gap in the hills, a flaming sun sank slowly behind two snow-crowned, sharp-cut peaks, which looked one, but were perhaps twenty miles apart. Frances forgot her errand, her eagerness to execute it, and stood silently with her uplifted gaze on the hills before her, until the last glow of the sunset had vanished and the grey twilight met and melted into the black shadows from the hills.

With the change, the one house on the "flat" which had during the splendour of the day been an inconspicuous feature of the landscape, now dominated it, as a many-faceted and brilliant jewel may shine upon a dark velvet gown. Lights gleamed from numerous windows. "A palace!" Old Alexander Campbell's words recurred to her. It was indeed a palace in Zenith; Zenith of the two- and three-roomed cabins.

CHAPTER THREE

Her ring at the door was answered by a Chinese servant, and upon her request to see Mr. Garvin, she was ushered into a large room so flooded with light that, coming from the soft twilight without, she was almost blinded; and she was further dazzled by a richness of fitting and furnishing which struck upon her eyes almost like a blow, and left her for the moment confused and bewildered.

The room was indeed garish and ostentatious to a degree. Heavy, flowered red curtains fell over inner ones of white lace before the windows. There were great upholstered red satin chairs and couches alternating with spindle-legged gilt ones. The lamps which were in profusion were covered with white and scarlet shades. There was a litter of bric-a-brac on tables and pedestals, and upon the walls were pictures representing various kinds of cheap sentiment—Watteau young men and women embracing in terraced gardens, or stout cardinals in gorgeous robes smiling upon Louis Quatorze waiting-maids.

Frances shrank back involuntarily from the glare, and then, as she became more accustomed to it, her glance fell upon a slight figure which had risen from one of the great chairs, pushing back a table before her to do so. It was a pale and weary girl. Her dull brown hair lay in one long plait down her back, and a tea-gown of some gauzy texture and of an extreme and eccentric mode fell from her thin shoulders. Her face, still pretty, showed that she had once possessed a radiant and flower-like beauty; but the skin had yellowed

THE NEW MISSIONER

with ill-health, and was covered with many fine lines of weariness and pain. The brilliant eyes shone with a fitful and feverish light.

"How do you do?" she said in a weak, petulant voice. "Was you wanting to see me?"

"I am Frances Benson, a Missionary," said her uninvited guest, "and I came to see Mr. Garvin about renting a cabin."

"Oh, the Missionary!" She viewed Frances half respectfully, half resentfully. "Won't you sit down? I'll call him. Wa—lt!" lifting her voice; "say, Walt, come here!"

The curtains before the door parted, and a tall, thin man, with a worn and lined face and deeply sunken eyes, entered.

"What's the matter, Lutie? Oh," his eyes falling upon Frances, "excuse me. I'll get my coat."

The woman laughed. "Ain't Walt funny, though? He's got such manners as never was. I tell you what, I like it, just the same. Say——"

But before she could finish her sentence Garvin had reappeared. He drew a chair near to Frances and sat down. His manner was quiet and simple, and struck her favourably.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Garvin. I have recently come to live in Zenith. I am a missionary, you know, and I want a cabin of my own. It isn't convenient for me to live at the Thorn House any longer."

"No, I can easily understand that," he said thought-

CHAPTER THREE

fully. His deep eyes had gazed at her steadily while she had been speaking. "Let me see. There's a little two-room cabin upon a ledge of rock on Corona. It's a kind of lonely place for you, though."

"Oh, I'm never lonely," she reassured him with a smile. "Never."

"Very well. I will give you the key and you can go up and look over it when you have time. I will be glad to have someone occupying it."

He left the room to get the proffered key, and Frances stood up, ready to go upon his return; but Lutie was gazing at her with a kind of eager excitement.

"Oh, don't go!" she cried, and there was a real earnestness in the petulant pleading of her voice. "Do stay and talk to me a while." She flicked a pile of fashion magazines and catalogues on the table before her. "Look," pointing to a heap of clippings, "I've been cutting out those for hours and hours—pictures, you know, of the latest gowns and hats and wraps and things. Here's a hat I'm going to send for. Say, Walt, I wish you'd write for this to-night." Garvin had entered while she had been talking, handed Frances the key, and disappeared again. "Oh," went on Lutie, glancing behind her, "he's gone. I don't care, I'm tired of 'em, anyway. I'm tired of everything." Her haggard gaze hung on the missionary. "Dead tired. Walt's going to take me on a trip as soon as I'm well enough to travel. The doctor says I'll be worse if I leave this dry air; but I know I'll be worse if I stay here in this dead old hole."

THE NEW MISSIONER

She had sunk back in her chair, and now she studied the quiet figure of the missionary through her half-closed eyes for a moment or two, and then lifted her chin with a sort of defiant bravado.

"I s'pose you think I'm something perfectly awful, don't you, because Walt and I aren't married?"

Frances shrank a little. She was not prepared for these intimate revelations. Her face flushed deeply.

"I—I didn't know that——"

"We weren't?" finished Lutie, with a hard little laugh. "Well, we're not. How on earth could we be? I'm all tangled up with husbands," shrugging her thin shoulders impatiently. "I've got three of them around somewhere."

"But you're so young," cried the missionary, surprised into the exclamation.

"Twenty-five. I began young, you see," with another of her mirthless laughs. "But," sitting upright and speaking emphatically, her frail figure dilating with pride, "nobody needn't make any mistake about one thing. Walt would marry me like a shot, just like a shot, if he could. Oh, the law's an awful stupid thing. It makes me tired." Her head drooped. "Say," with sudden animation, "I tell you what. You want to see Angel. Wa—a—lt! say, Walt!" as he answered the summons, "tell one of those Chinamen to chase Angel in here. I want the lady to see her." Then to Frances. "Are you going to have Sunday school? Good!"—in answer to an affirmative reply. "You bet she'll go. She needs it bad enough."

CHAPTER THREE

“Say,” warmly, her feverish vivacity continuing, “I believe you’re a good sort. Ethel said you were; but I don’t pay much attention to what she says. She splashes her religion around so. It’s like my canary bird there taking a bath. Wait,” holding up her hand and listening. “Here’s Angel.”

There was a patter of feet without, a little voice asking questions, and a child ran into the room, a girl of about six years. Her expensive and elaborate frock was stained with clay and wet to the waist, the sleeve was hanging in ribbons from one deeply scratched little arm. Her feet and legs were bare and scarlet. She stopped halfway in the room and stood still, gazing at Frances Benson, and under the regard of those baby eyes the missionary felt a shock and a thrill. An emotion she could hardly have defined as either awe or wonder swept over her, and yet it seemed compounded of both; for here was a personality.

The eyes regarding her so steadily were of a clear grey, with cold blue lights like one of the icy mountain brooks in sunlight and in shadow. The head was covered with tossed, brown curls and the face was a lovely little mask.

Caught under one arm, but held closely to her side, was an enormous striped cat, apparently the victor of many hard-fought battles, if one could judge from the number of scars it carried. One ear was half torn away, and across its particularly evil and sinister face was a broad white welt where the fur refused to grow. Its eyes glowered with a fierce and baleful light.

THE NEW MISSIONER

"Oh, Angel," wailed her mother, "don't let that beast loose. What did you mean by bringing him in here? He's half a coon cat, and likely to tear our eyes out."

"What's his name, dear?" asked Frances, although shrinking slightly from him herself.

"Lambie," replied the child gravely.

Her mother burst into her little hysterical, shrill laugh. "He looks like a lamb, don't he?"

"He catches rabbits and chipmunks," said the child, "wif these." She pressed one of the cat's paws until his long, curving claws shot out, "and wif these." She pushed back his lip, disclosing the pointed, carnivorous teeth. The animal, resenting such treatment, snarled and struggled to be free. Angel, holding him fast, laughed, and Frances, hearing that cold, gay, irresponsible ripple, thought again of mountain streams. Lambie, however, continued to snarl and struggle.

"Shut up!" said Angel, rapping him smartly over the head, "shut up, or I'll break your damn neck."

"Oh, Angel, how you talk!" expostulated Lutie. "And you're in your bare feet again. We can't keep shoes and stockings on her, even in winter," she complained. "And look at your new dress! That dress cost fifty dollars. Now what's happened to your arm?"

Angel looked indifferently at the torn little arm where the blood had scarcely dried. "Lambie scatched it," she explained to Frances. "He caught a rabbit, a live one. It was pretty, and I wanted it; so we fought

CHAPTER THREE

for it. I got it." She caught the cat up and held it as if it were a baby, looking triumphantly down into its blinking, evil eyes.

"Isn't she awful?" mourned Lutie. "Do put the beast out, Angel."

The child walked to the door, opened it, and threw Lambie out unceremoniously.

"Won't you shake hands with me?" asked Frances, rising to go and extending her hand.

But Angel made no response.

"She won't touch anybody," said her mother. "She'll hug her animals all day, but she won't even kiss Walt or me, and Walt would be awful fond of her if she'd let him. She ain't his, you know. My second husband was her father. Sometimes I kiss her when she's asleep; that's the only chance I get, and then you should see her toss and frown."

Frances looked down at the beautiful, unsmiling little face.

"What did you do with the rabbit Lambie caught?" she asked curiously.

"I let him go," said Angel laconically. "I get him again if I wants him."

"She will, too," affirmed Lutie. "Oh, she's awful queer. Say, Miss Benson, won't you come and see me again? I get so darned lonesome I don't know what to do. Ethel comes sometimes, and Mis' Nitschkan drops in every once in a while. I like that old pirate. She makes me laugh; and Landvetter, she brings her knitting once in so often; but Mis' Evans, never! Not she.

THE NEW MISSIONER

She's awful proud, you know, and I don't sport no gay, gold wedding ring; but you'll come, won't you?"

Her voice had grown so weak that it was almost inaudible; the colour had risen on her cheeks, and she pressed her hand to her chest as if the mere effort to breathe distressed her.

"Yes," said Frances, filled with compassion; "yes, I'll come whenever you want me. Good-night."

CHAPTER FOUR

IT did not take Frances long to come to a decision about the cabin on Corona. The day after her call on Mr. Garvin she formally leased it, with the intention of taking possession at once; but her plans were, if not frustrated, delayed for a short time, by the not unexpected death of Mrs. Thomas's husband, who, after a winter's struggle with miner's consumption, had finally yielded to his stronger adversary.

For a few days, at any rate, Frances found every moment of her time occupied in consoling the widow and attending to the details of the elaborate funeral which Mrs. Thomas and Zenith regarded as the due of the man who had been so considerate as to leave his widow "property."

It was therefore a week or two later before the missionary could regard herself as finally settled. Her cabin was about half a mile above the village on the mountain side, with a ledge of protecting rock above the roof. It consisted of but two rooms; but no mistress of an ancestral domain had ever felt more pride and joy in her possessions than Frances experienced when her simple preparations for housekeeping were concluded.

She had always lived in a "room," and this was a home. Garvin had had the walls freshly whitewashed,

THE NEW MISSIONER

and she had driven ten miles over the mountains to Mount Tabor, a neighbouring and larger village, and selected her simple furnishings. In one room was her narrow bed, a chest of drawers, a table with her few books, and a chair or two. The other room, into which the outer door opened, contained her little cooking stove; behind it shelves ran up to the ceiling; on these gleamed her few and dainty cooking utensils and dishes. There was still room for three or four chairs and the small dining table with its trimmed lamp in the centre, her workbox and one or two books and papers. It was all so plain, so simple, and withal expressed such satisfying and exquisite neatness, that it held the gracious charm of order and repose.

Frances stood on a chair before the window adjusting the new swiss curtains she had just completed. Finishing her task, she jumped down and stepped back the better to view the result, her face dimpling with pleasure and her eyes full of an almost girlish joy. A home at last—her home; and her world without, a wonderful new world!

She threw open the door and stood on the threshold. It was early, early spring. Over there, across the road, patches of snow still lingered among the trees; but on the high branches there was the faint tracery of delicate green tassels. About ten feet from her door the earth broke sharply away into a deep, rocky gulch. A little bridge spanned this, and a mountain brook rippled and gurgled over the rocks eternally. It soothed her to sleep at night, and she awoke each morning to its fresh, pure

CHAPTER FOUR

music. Between a break in the trees she could see the tip of a snowy peak.

Oh, splendid hills of strength! She drew a long breath of content. She was settled here. She had won the respect of the people: her face drooped a little at the remembrance of her methods. Ah, well,—resolutely putting that from her,—she meant to win their love also.

A shout aroused her from her musings, and she looked up to see old Alexander Herries coming across the bridge. He had been of real assistance in helping her to arrange her few possessions, and now she welcomed him with a smile of pleasure.

“Good-morning, Mr. Herries!” she cried. “I’m all settled. I’ve got a home at last. Come in.”

She made him sit down in the easy chair, and pointed out the completeness of her arrangements, listening with a smile and a blush while he admired the results to which he had contributed.

“The chimney draws well?” he asked.

“Perfectly. And have you been down to the village so early?”

“I have. I needed some coffee and sugar. In the store I heard the usual gossip, and more, aye, and more.” He leaned forward, and she shrank back a little from the eager malice of his expression. “’Tis something new to-day. Sile Evans and his wife have quarrelled and parted. He’s taken the Beebee cabin, the first above the mine.”

“Mr. Evans and his wife!” she repeated. “What a pity! Why, they have three or four little children.”

THE NEW MISSIONER

"Sure. I am surprised," he owned, wagging his jaw. "I thought she had succeeded in clipping his claws and pulling his teeth. There must have been one or two left, though, and he balked at losing them." He laughed, and his mirth, as always, struck unpleasantly on her ear. It was so discordantly bitter. "But," noting her grave face, "I got something else beside gossip at the store. Here,"—he drew a small whistle from his pocket,—"when 'tis any bit of mending or tinkering you'll be wanting done, ye can just let me know. Sound on that, and I'll be with you in five minutes."

Touched by his kindness, she reproached herself for the harsh judgment of him of a moment before, and thanked him warmly.

"'Tis unnecessary," he said, although well pleased at her evidence of gratitude, "and thanks take up good time. I'll be going soon, for you're to have a visitor. I heard the Widow Thomas telling some of her friends in the store that she meant to pay you a call this morning. The widow!" his mouth twisting. "She'll be a widow about two months."

"She's very handsome," said Frances.

"When you get to know her, you'll find her every variety of the feminine fool," he replied, with his customary scornful emphasis.

"Oh, Mr. Herries!" she remonstrated, distress in her eyes; "you are very severe."

"I'm honest, ye mean. Bah! 'Tis a world of lies!" He stared moodily at the ground, working his jaw. When he looked up his face had softened. "Well, I

CHAPTER FOUR

heard you met little Angel. Now, let me tell you, there's somebody. Aye, a wonderful child!"

"You like strange people, don't you, Mr. Herries? I have heard you mention almost everyone in Zenith, and you have only spoken a good word for two—Angel and Mr. Campbell."

"Humph! And why do you think that is so?" lifting his head and fixing her with his piercing gaze. "Because they are no shams. They live and act from within. They are natural. Why, did ye know"—with a touch of pride—"that I am the only person in Zenith that little Angel will have anything to do with? She and I wander over the hills all day sometimes. She won't have Campbell about," with a chuckle. "Her mother says she's to go to Sunday school." He gave a great laugh.

"Well, why not?" asked Frances coldly. "I certainly think from what I saw of the child, and the way I heard her talk, that it will be the best thing for her."

"You do?" turning his head sidewise and looking at her attentively. "Do you understand Angel at all, I wonder?"

"Understand her!" She looked puzzled. "No," slowly, "I don't think I do."

"It is not a question of think," he answered bluntly. "You do not; and never will. She is outside of you."

Frances pondered this statement for a time in silence. "Mr. Herries," she said at last, and with apparent irrelevance, "I want to ask you something. Why have you been so kind and helpful to me? You do not care for religion, nor for the work I am here to do. I have

THE NEW MISSIONER

thought sometimes that it was only because I succeeded in gaining ascendancy over a group of women whom you detest. That I gained the ascendancy is true; but it was by methods I am ashamed of."

"Humph!" he scoffed. "I care nothing for your methods. I like force, character, whether scrupulous or unscrupulous; but if you'll have the truth, take it. Your principal recommendation is that you're neither a coward nor a liar. I hate 'em both. Ah-h-h!" holding up his hand as she was about to interrupt him. "Maybe you've told a lie now and then—few of us haven't; what of that? It's that in your nature, to the very marrow of your bones; you're true. But,"—his face lighting with queer, malicious glee,—“you're narrow, just the same. There's two or three of us in Zenith that ye'll never understand, and one of 'em's little Angel. Listen!" his quick ear catching the sound of footsteps on the bridge, “here's the Widow."

There was a hesitating knock, and Frances opened the door to admit the tall figure of Mrs. Thomas, clad all in new and becoming black. On seeing Mr. Herries, she hesitated a moment on the threshold, and then, modestly lowering her eyelids and letting her mouth assume a more decided droop, she entered.

Adjusting her new crape veil over the back of her chair, she sat smoothing her gloves, equally new, and sighing heavily from time to time.

"It's most the first time I been in anyone's house," she said, addressing Herries, who had risen to go upon her entrance, “an' it's awful hard." She shook her head

CHAPTER FOUR

slightly from side to side, and fluttered her broad white eyelids at him. "But don't let me frighten you off, Mr. Herries. I couldn't 'a' passed that door if there'd been anybody else but you."

But Herries, unheeding this flattering remark, and with one sardonic glance at the missionary, quickly departed, and Mrs. Thomas, in spite of her anxiety to maintain what she considered the proper deportment of one so recently bereaved, was incapable of long concealing the important object of her visit.

"Say, Missioner, what do you think!" she cried excitedly, not only casting aside those trappings of woe,—her handkerchief and her gloves,—but also her expression of profound grief. "The girls sent me to tell you something. They felt it might kind o' take my mind off things, so I come to say that you been elected to the Ladies' Aid Society."

Frances's mind reverted to Herries's words: "One of the kitchens in hell where considerable broth is brewed."

"The Ladies' Aid Society!" she repeated dubiously.

"My land, yes!" cried Mrs. Thomas, aghast at this lack of enthusiasm. "I guess you don't quite know about it. Well, you ain't nobody in Zenith unless you're in it, and it's awful hard to get in, I can tell you. We kept Ethel waiting three months, an' we ain't never let Mis' Garvin through yet."

Truth to say, the Ladies' Aid Society was so important a factor in the life of Zenith, that it is deserving a word or two of explanation.

As the centres of culture have their woman's clubs,

THE NEW MISSIONER

their Lenten lectures, classes in this or that, morning bridge, matinees, and afternoon teas, so Zenith included and combined them all in the Ladies' Aid Society, obliterating the boundaries separating these various manifestations of the eternal feminine, but retaining the spirit of each.

A narrow interpretation of the name and purpose of the organisation might seem to limit its activities to the worthy, if uninteresting, altruism of the good Samaritan; but to the initiated this would appear as the unimaginative, uninspired reading of a purist in phrasing. Although ostensibly what its name proclaimed, the Society was also a forum for the discussion of events of the hour and a foyer for the display of fashions. It served not only as a weekly excuse for such feathers and furbelows as Zenith could muster; it was also an exchange for borrowing and lending, for "news and pottage," the gossip of the bazaar; and this was but the half, for the keen edge of interest was constantly whetted by its politics, its cabals, its intrigues, which not infrequently flamed into swift debate and impassioned and acrimonious oratory.

Reduced to its last analysis, the Aid Society was easily symbolised as the feminine brain of Zenith, passionately protected from the rough, disintegrating touch of man, who for some reason regarded it as a menace to his material comfort and mental supremacy, and ever sought to dissolve it.

But perhaps its meaning, its hold upon the affections, and its place in the life of Zenith are more clearly

CHAPTER FOUR

presented in the words of Mrs. Thomas, than by any contradictory and halting descriptions.

"How'd ever us poor women bear our lives without the Aid Society?" she asked Frances indignantly. "It gives us somethin' to dress up for, once a week, an' somethin' to sharpen our wits on an' loosen our tongues over, at the same time. Besides, we're a-doin' for the heathen in the uttermost parts of the earth, an' the poor that's always with you—when you don't set the dog on 'em."

She sighed virtuously, and again smoothed her black gloves on her knee.

"An' now that you're one of us, Missioner, Mis' Nitschkan an' Mis' Landvetter 'n' me thought you'd like to come with us this morning to pay a call on Mis' Evans. You know she's separated, either temporary or permanent, from Sile, an' she likes things done very formal, so us girls are sort of goin' in a body to show we stand by her."

Even Frances Benson, assenting and pinning on her hat before her small mirror, little realised how sweeping was her victory, a victory of fear, perhaps; but nevertheless, very complete.

"This is sure nice," cooed Mrs. Thomas, tucking her arm comfortably under that of her companion as they walked over the bridge and down the road. "You been a true friend to me in my trouble, and I ain't going to forget it."

"I'm sorry about Mrs. Evans," murmured Frances.

"Aw, men are the deuce, ain't they?" advanced Mrs.

THE NEW MISSIONER

Thomas philosophically. "Best let 'em alone, if you can, only that ain't so easy. And yet," generously, "they're sort o' nice, too. Gentlemen have always been very kind to me, 'ceptin' poor Seth, of course; but then, you can't hardly call husbands 'gentlemen,' can you?"

Gaining the village, the ladies paused to pick up Mrs. Nitschkan and Mrs. Landvetter, and the four, in a somewhat cocky-locky, and goosey-poosey procession, set out for the home of Silas Evans, now in possession of his wife and four children.

It was one of the trimmest and best cared for in the village, with none of the *laissez-aller*, the indifference to its blue china, which characterised most of the houses in Zenith, whose owners apparently were quite content to live down to the tin cans and entangling wires about the doorsteps, undisturbed by any æsthetic yearnings toward blue pottery.

However, the front yard but presaged the immaculate order maintained within the house. Adhering to the unwritten laws prescribed by Mrs. Evans's precise formality, her guests never permitted themselves the luxury of following their vagrant impulses and running in at the back door. They habitually knocked upon the front door, and were admitted into a dining-room spotless and shining, the floor covered with a bright rag carpet, the stove ever polished and black. Upon the walls were worked texts and framed photographs, while the window was gay with blooming plants, geraniums, portulaca, German ivy, and begonia.

CHAPTER FOUR

In these pleasant surroundings sat the mistress of the house in a fresh calico gown and a white collar. Her flying moments were never wasted, and she was now busily occupied in cutting down the garments of her elder daughter Eolanthe, to fit the younger, Celora.

At the first knock heralding the arrival of her four visitors, she sprang forward and opened the door.

"Good-morning, Nitschkan!" she cried hospitably, as that masculine and breezy lady of the mountains entered. "How are you?"

"Able to set up and take my beef tea," chuckled Mrs. Nitschkan. "Let the door ajar, here comes the other girls."

"Come right in, ladies," called their hostess heartily. "I hope you brought your sewing with you. Missioner, this is an honour. Take this rocker."

"Sewin'! Well, just 'cause I hate it more'n pizen, I got some to do, worse luck," responded Mrs. Nitschkan. "The last time we was sewin' on those duds for worse heathen than ourselves, the Bishop, he says to me, 'Don't look so down in the mouth, Mis' Nitschkan, you're doin' the Lord's work.' 'Well,' I says, 'I ain't so sure of it. If it's the Lord's work for a woman to set all day an' stick a needle in an' out of a piece o' goods, why, I'm boun' to disagree with him.'"

"You vas born to disagree, Nitschkan," said Mrs. Landvetter, from the rocking chair before the stove, where she had deposited her huge bulk. She was, as usual, knitting lace in the elaborate and intricate pattern she loved, counting the stitches as she talked.

THE NEW MISSIONER

“One—two—three—four—five. Yes, you vas born to disagree, and den it’s de odder fellow dat gets hurt.”

Mrs. Nitschkan laughed.

“Well, las’ Sunday, when Missioner, here, give out in church, ‘Thou shalt build up the old waists,’ I couldn’t help givin’ Celia a nudge that nearly sent her off the seat. ‘That’s my tex’, all right,’ I whispered to myself. God knows it’s what I’ve been a-doin’ fer the last week. My kids is the crankiest monkeys that ever was, in the way their clothes has to be made.”

“All kids is cranky,” said Mrs. Evans succinctly. “An’ the Lord knows the men is.”

“That’s true enough,” commented Mrs. Thomas devoutly. “Myrtle Swanstrom was askin’ me the other day what I thought of marriage. ‘It’s a quick jump,’ I says, ‘from molasses to snake-root.’”

“You hit the nail on the head that time,” responded Mrs. Evans. “Mis’ Thomas, will you see to the tea and coffee. Everything’s ready on the lower shelf and the kittle’s boilin’. Which will you take, Missioner? Tea. Mis’ Thomas, make a specially nice cup for Missioner. Well,” drawing a long breath, “I suppose you’ve heard about my trouble with Sile, girls?”

Mrs. Thomas groaned as she poured the coffee and passed the cups. Mrs. Landvetter sighed and counted her stitches lugubriously; but Mrs. Nitschkan threw her head back with an habitual, devil-may-care gesture:

“Gosh A’mighty! what does that matter?” she cried. “Dogs an’ men is just alike. You got to beat ’em, an’

CHAPTER FOUR

every once in a while drive 'em off the place, before you get any good out of 'em."

"Well, I jus' got tired of the way things was goin', an' Sile an' me had it out," narrated Mrs. Evans. "I told him in the first place to let that cut-throat lease, he signed, alone. Any fool miner in the camp ought to have known the minute he put eyes on Brown and his fox-grin, that he might as well sell himself to the devil as sign one of his contracts. Well, you know what men are, and you know just how easy one man can get around another, an' you all know that men ain't got no more sense than children, for all they're as obstinate as mules. Well, where are we now? So deep in debt at the store that I'm ashamed to show my face. But what can you expect? Sile hadn't no bringin' up to speak of. You all know what his folks was. I read him the family pedigree good an' strong the night we quit."

"What did he do?" asked Mrs. Nitschkan, leaning forward eagerly, "hit you?"

"You bet he didn't. Hit a McKenzie? Well, I guess not! Here, ladies, let me fill your cups again. I'll tell you,"—pausing with uplifted coffee-pot, while the frown deepened between her brows,—“I could 'a' bore the lease, perhaps, but that sister of his,—that cat of a Mary Ellen,—no, indeed!"

"La! la! la!" exclaimed Mrs. Landvetter. "Und how vas dat?"

"Why, I went clean over to Mount Tabor the other day to collect the rent from the house my father left me. Well, I knocked an' knocked, and at last she come

THE NEW MISSIONER

to the door. 'Oh!' says she, 'Mis' Evans?' as formal as that, you see. 'Won't you come in?' 'No, Mary Ellen,' I says, 'I will not come in. The door-step's good enough for me, an' what I've got to say is this: "I want my rent." She didn't say a word, but kind o' looked down, an' I went right on. 'Now look here, Mary Ellen,' I says, 'right's right and wrong's wrong. You've always been slack with your rent, and I've never pressed you, as I might another, seein' as you're Sile's sister; but my stock of patience is about used up. You've got a house full of lodgers, an' every one of 'em working, an' there ain't no reason why you should hold back the rent on me.'"

"'The boys is havin' bad luck,' she says, sort o' sullen.

"'Bad luck nothin'!' I says. 'They've been workin' in the best payin' mines around. If they've had any bad luck, it's playin' faro. I'll tell you where the money's gone,' I says. 'It's gone buyin' pink organdies and feather boas. That's where it's gone.'

"'It's none of your business what I buy,' she snapped, 'an' I'll pay your old rent when I get good an' ready, an' not before. Get off my steps,' she says; 'I scrubbed 'em fresh this morning.'

"Well, girls, my blood boiled; but I didn't lose my temper. I says quite cool, 'I'll not get off your steps till I choose, an' I may conclude to stay all night an' call the marshal an' have the things moved out into the street.'

"'Aw, you dirty cat!' she says, an' made a lunge

CHAPTER FOUR

at me an'—an' did this with her low-bred nails.' ” She pointed to a scarlet line which ran from her eye to her chin, noticeably, if temporarily, marring her good looks.

“ Girls, you know I'm no coward; but something just seemed to come over me,—maybe it was the words you spoke in church last Sunday, Missioner. ‘ Don't put yourself on a level with this rent-robbing creature. Don't forget you're a lady.’ An', girls, I just turned on that step, give her one kick an' walked off.”

“ Well,” commented Mrs. Nitschkan disappointedly, “ we all know you ain't no coward, but you'd better believe I'd 'a' done her up when I had the chance. Still,” hopefully, “ there's more ways of killin' a cat than by chokin' her with butter.”

“ My! my!” muttered Mrs. Landvetter; “ vell, you can't neffer tell.”

“ Say,” broke in Mrs. Evans eagerly, “ is it true that Sile's up bachin' on Corona, in old man Beebee's cabin, an' that he's gone to work at the Mont d'Or? ”

“ Yes,” affirmed Frances, since no one else seemed to know. “ It must be. I saw him going to work this morning. He—he—doesn't look very happy.”

“ I hope he ain't,” said Mrs. Evans emphatically. “ He don't deserve to be.”

CHAPTER FIVE

ZENITH gradually absorbed Frances Benson. As the months wore on the great world beyond the blue barriers of the mountains became merely a remembered dream of unimportant movements and inconsequent events; and this village, lying in a gash in the hillside was, as far as her interests were concerned, the universe.

The change was so slow and imperceptible as to be unsuspected and unanalysed by herself; but gradually the mountain road before her door became to her as one of the great highways. Always before she had lived in large cities where crowds meet and jostle and travel hither and thither in a series of erratic movements, their progress as purposeless and aimless to the onlooker as that of black ants crawling hurriedly to and fro. Or, to express it as it had appeared to her, a city had seemed like a page covered with undecipherable characters; but here the page was clear to her, the meaning was plain; she was learning to read, and the key to the hieroglyphics was interest. Her understanding had become illumined through sympathy.

Sooner or later, during the day or week, this world that she was beginning to know passed before her doors. Old Campbell trudged up the hill, his wire in his hand, his Bible under his arm, to seek the high solitudes his spirit craved for the pondering of the mysteries and the exercise of his gift.

CHAPTER FIVE

There pretty Myrtle Swanstrom strolled with one or more of her many admirers; Alexander Herries passed up and down gathering gossip, with Angel dancing at his side, her evil cat tucked under one arm or a puppy trotting on unstable legs at her heels. Sometimes the ladies of the Aid Society passed in groups of two or three, their heads together; and, very lately, tramping down the hill in the morning and back again at night, the dejected figure of Silas Evans, his dinner pail swinging listlessly from his hand. He was a great raw-boned fellow, with a stoop to his shoulders, and an honest kindly face; but daily his tall form became more gaunt, his shoulders more bowed, and his gentle, confiding eyes were glazed with gloom.

Frances, who daily watched him come and go, longed to speak to him, to lighten by word or smile his deepening melancholy; but Evans apparently never saw her standing in her cabin door or on the little bridge over the rushing stream. His mind held but one picture, and dwelt upon it unceasingly—a genre picture framed by a window-sash; three charming little heads above a sill of blooming plants, watching the road anxiously for his home-coming—the home denied him by his own action.

He lived over and over again the last scene between his wife and himself. Things had not been going well between them for a long time; he was disturbed and unhappy because of their dissensions, but his simple mind had never harboured the thought of a final break, and it had come suddenly like an earthquake shock.

THE NEW MISSIONER

With no hint of the tempest brewing, he had come home one evening from his day's work in the mines to find himself in the very heart of the storm.

As usual upon his entrance to the house, the children had swarmed about him, and he, lifting the baby to his shoulder, had glanced apprehensively over its head into the kitchen where his wife stood busily occupied over the stove; but she had neither called to him nor in any way noticed his arrival, maintaining an aggressive and effectual unconsciousness of his presence.

At last, her preliminary preparations completed, she came into the dining-room and spread a stiffly starched cloth on the table, her eyes indifferent, her manner pre-occupied, although Evans could not fail to notice that down one cheek, which was ostentatiously held toward him, ran a deep scarlet line like a scratch from eye to chin. Then, slamming down a number of dishes, she announced supper, shortly bidding the children take their places. Save for the clamour of the little ones, the meal progressed in silence.

Still in silence, so far as her husband was concerned, Mrs. Evans cleared away the supper things and sent the children to bed. Then placing a student lamp in the centre of the table and seating herself where the light fell strongest she sewed silently and energetically, imparting to the room an atmosphere of storm, herself its electric centre, the quick jerk of her arm and the flash of her needle in the lamplight giving the impression of occasional lightning.

She still preserved a careful unconsciousness of the

CHAPTER FIVE

furtive and placating glances of Evans, who forlornly smoked his pipe on the opposite side of the student lamp, his feet stretched out to the open grate stove; but by the token of the cheek with the scar on it being still carefully turned toward him, it might be inferred that her abstraction was more a matter of art than an expression of nature.

Finally, the man blundered, as man ever must in a match game of finesse between the sexes, and lost the trick.

After opening his mouth two or three times and shutting it again over his pipe, he said in tones which strove to be full of an off-hand confidential interest—suggestive of a camaraderie extending even to the heart of the storm centre: “What’s the matter with your cheek, Effie?”

She snapped the thread viciously, cast the white muslin down on the table, threw her scissors and thimble into the heap, and faced about with blazing eyes.

“Why, your sister done it—that’s what’s the matter.”

“Mary Ellen!” in surprise.

“Yes, Mary Ellen,” she mimicked. “I seen her last week over here to Zenith, comin’ in to prayer-meeting—why don’t she go to prayer-meeting in Mount Tabor, where she belongs—in that pink organdie and new grey feather boa, and it made me sick. Do I get any pink organdies or grey feather boas? An’ her livin’ in the house that my father’s money bought, an’ never payin’ a cent of rent, an’ us owin’ at the store like we do. It’s

THE NEW MISSIONER

more'n I can bear. When I go to get my meat an' vegetables in the morning I got to stand around an' wait while Mis' Thomas, an' Mis' Nitschkan, an' Mis' Ames an' all the rest gets waited on—me that's always held my head up with the best, an' had a right to, too."

The storm had burst. The thunder that had muttered and the lightning that had flashed on the horizon were now booming and striking all about him. Her words fell on him like a shower of hail, stinging, biting into his brain.

He leaned his elbows on his knees and sank his head into his great horny hands.

"Aw, you can groan if you want to," cried the woman, stung to frenzy in her tenderest spot, her indomitable pride; "but I've bore it as long as I'm goin' to, an' to-day I took the law into my own hands. I stopped at *my* house, bought with *my* money, and asked Mary Ellen for the rent, an' she wouldn't give me no satisfaction, an' scratched my face into the bargain."

Evans's head sank a little lower.

"Was there many around that seen the scrap?" he asked, his eyes on the carpet.

"Don't be afraid," she mocked; "there wasn't no scrap. Your sister's beauty's safe."

He looked at her unbelievably, cogitatively, questioningly; but she refused to gratify his curiosity.

"Of course she'd liked a scrap—nothin' better; but not with me, not with a McKenzie. Sile Evans," she continued passionately, "you know what your folks

CHAPTER FIVE

was, an' you know what mine was. Now, when I got some birth an' breedin' on my side, an' wasn't born no poor rat like you an' your sister, why don't you let me have some say?"

"I guess you've had enough say for one night," he said heavily, rising to wind the clock. "I guess I'll go to bed now."

She threw herself before the door.

"Sile Evans, I've known from the first that that lease wasn't goin' to be no good, an' I begged an' begged you not to take it. The first time I put my eyes on that Brown you leased from, I knew what he was—shifty-faced fox, with his jaws smeared with butter—but nothin' would do but that you'd got to sign up with him. An' where are you now?"

At her words, the smouldering spark in Silas Evans's eyes blazed.

"Where am I now?" he cried. "By God! where am I now? I've drove in two hundred feet, and I've struck one of the best payin' streaks in the camp. I could be making two hundred dollars, three hundred dollars, five hundred dollars a month, if the trammers wasn't kept busy in another part of the mine. If I could get my ore hauled to another mill, where the charges ain't so high as at the Company's mill; if I didn't have to buy all my supplies from the Company; if Brown hadn't said so easy when we made the contract that the roy'lty would run from twenty-five to fifty per cent., an' then charged me fifty the minute we struck the vein—where am I now, you ask? Why, I'd be all right—on the top of the

THE NEW MISSIONER

heap—if Brown only panned out one-half per cent. honest! I don't care what you say, no matter how you put it, I ain't got nothin' to blame myself with. My judgment was all right. Ain't the ore there?"

His bluster was in reality a plea, not only for the justification of his business acumen, but to retain that intangible bond of a happy marriage—the wife's respect for her husband.

Mrs. Evans, however, did not soften. In her eyes was the clear, implacable glitter of the woman whose affection is measured largely by her ambition, and her words were the poisoned arrows of one who has discovered a latent gift for sarcasm and has no intention of wrapping her talent in a napkin.

"Oh, yes; your judgment was all right," she jeered. "Ketch a man ever sayin' that he's in the wrong! Oh, of course, it was all right for you to sign up Brown's lease; any fool miner in the camp ought to have known the minute he put eyes on Brown that he might as well sell himself to the devil as sign one of his contracts. It just meant you were tying yourself up to find ore for Mr. Brown, an' then when you done your stint you was to be froze out."

The arrows poisoned, the eyes stabbed; but Evans strove unequally to cope with her on her own ground—that of sarcasm.

"Well, since you're so smart," he demanded, "what have you got to suggest that's any better? I suppose you'd want me to throw up my lease to-morrow; then, what have I got before me? A job at day's wages an'

CHAPTER FIVE

two or three years of debt-payin'. That is," a lump rose in his throat, "pervided you an' the kids don't get sick, nor need no clothes, nor want nothin' to eat but beans an' sow-belly. Aw"—his voice breaking—"what's the use of talkin'?"

"This use," she replied defiantly, "that I told you, an' I told you true, that I've bore all I'm a-goin' to! I've begged an' I've plead with you about that lease; there ain't been a day that I ain't begged you to throw it up an' go round to the Mont d'Or. Walt Garvin's wantin' a foreman there; but no, you're so set that you can't see no way but your own. An' besides all that, you won't take no hand in helpin' me to get my rent out of Mary Ellen, or in puttin' her out of my house, 'cause she comes whinin' to you, makin' a poor mouth an' gettin' on your soft side, like any woman that tells her troubles to a man can get around him. It's the las' straw, I tell you—the las' straw!

"Now," she announced determinedly, "I'm a-goin' to take matters into my own hands an' pervide for my kids as they've a right to be pervided for. I don't care whether it shames you before the whole camp or whether it don't."

He turned and looked at her. "What do you mean?" he growled.

"I mean this: I ain't a-goin' to see everything go to rack an' ruin as long as I got a shoulder to put to the wheel. I seen old Johnson who drives the hack to the station and back three times a day. He's so crippled with rheumatism that he wants to go an' live with his

THE NEW MISSIONER

sister near some springs, where he can boil out. Well, I closed with him, an' I'm to drive the passengers up and down to the station, after this." She folded her arms challengingly upon her chest.

Then she saw fully, for the first time perhaps, the slow, struggling, mighty wrath of the gentle. Like the Biblical demon, his anger seemed to rend Silas and tear at his throat. His hands clenched, his mouth became granite, his chest heaved convulsively, his words were strained and hoarse.

"If you do," he said at last, "if you do, I leave this house and you for good."

For a moment his wife stood before him frightened to her soul, white-faced but unyielding; then: "I sure will," she said, and left the room.

Throughout the long night Evans sat stiff and rigid in a chair by the table, gazing before him with unseeing eyes. He was the victim of what is known in the vernacular as a cut-throat lease. Hard-working, steady-going, thoroughly dependable, a first-class miner, he had held excellent positions until he was overcome by the dream that haunts every man—that of being his own master—and the longing that possesses every miner, to lease some undeveloped part of a good mine and realise his bonanza hopes.

But now his dream mocked him, his hopes deserted him, and through the weary hours he battled with his Apollyon, the dreadful spectre of failure. When the grey dawn broke through the windows he was still sitting at the table. The lamp was low, now and then

CHAPTER FIVE

flaring uncertainly, and the open stove held only the cold, dead ashes of last night's fire.

He arose to his feet, looking around him dazedly for a moment, and then his face set as hard as the rock he mined. Pausing only to seize his hat and coat, he strode from the house without one farewell glance behind him.

After a day or two at the Thorn House, he had taken the one-room cabin above that of Frances, and renewed his pre-marital experience of "baching," to the intense excitement of the village.

Zenith, it should be said, never narrowly confined itself to the proverbial nine days' wonder; regarding such definitely proscribed limitations as artificial and effete. One topic was always made to last until the next arose. To put it vulgarly, the art of spreading a small bit of butter over a large slice of bread was thoroughly understood and demonstrated; and there was no flagging of interest, no haphazard discussion of the matter in hand, for Zenith fully grasped the artistic value of a great writer's dictum, that there is always something new to be said about even a stone.

Such humdrum topics as the last accident in the mines, the national crisis, or a newly discovered system for beating faro bank were dropped for the time, and the village joyously abandoned itself to the discussion of the Evans problem. Public opinion at first fluctuated, wavered, but finally veered steadily in the direction of Mrs. Evans, although, let it be said, households became divided on the subject; but, nevertheless, the

THE NEW MISSIONER

dejection of Evans's appearance, his rough refusal to discuss the subject, the seclusion he obstinately maintained, lost him the support of the camp.

He had always been a popular man in the village, one who had unconsciously commanded respect, because he was steady-going and square; but he had not heeded the gratuitous advice of the legion who now claimed to have warned him against the unscrupulous Brown and his cut-throat lease, and consequently he reaped the somewhat barren sympathy bestowed upon the unsuccessful. This world's darlings are those who openly defy her and carry their point by reckless, spectacular daring; and Mrs. Evans, without half the personal popularity of her husband, yet succeeded in capturing her audience by sheer pluck and bravado.

Daily, when she drove to and from the station, women left their washtubs and their baking to gather over the front gates; men congregated in groups at the Post Office or in front of "Johnson's"—the village saloon and gambling house. Mrs. Evans, apparently oblivious to this attention, was perched high up on the front seat of a long three-seated wagon drawn by two strong, shaggy horses. Her foot was on the brake as they clattered down the mountain road—a big, bold cliff on one side and a sheer fall of a thousand feet on the other. Her attitude was nonchalant, her expression one of gay decision. Arriving at the station, she would back her horses up to the platform, direct the men lounging there how to load the luggage on the boot of the vehicle, point out seats to the passengers, and then

CHAPTER FIVE

with a slap of the lines on the horses' backs urge them up the two-mile drive to the village, conversing on the topics of the day and the gossip of the mines as they drove along.

It was to be expected, then, that this subject which so completely absorbed the intellectual faculties of Zenith should come up for discussion one evening when Andrew Campbell, Ethel, and Herries had gathered in Frances's cabin.

The day had been mild, but the evening had grown chilly, and the red coals shining through the bars of the stove diffused not only a grateful warmth through the room, but imparted to it a cosey brightness.

The two old men occupied respectively the arm and the rocking chairs on opposite sides of the table, while Ethel, her blue cape and bonnet thrown aside, her fair hair twisted in a loose knot on the nape of her neck, moved restlessly about, her rapid speech and changing face indicating the vivacious impulses of her emotional nature. Frances herself, a composed figure, sat sewing in the radiance of the lamp-light.

Herries, his head bent, was tinkering at a lamp which Frances insisted was out of order.

"Did ye know that Evans is sick of a bad cold?" he asked, bringing forth his first item from his budget of gossip, as the peddler who knows his business draws forth the wares from his pack. He unrolls the goods with a quick jerk, then gathers it up in his hands, that the fabric may catch the light on its surfaces. His eyes are upon yours. If you show interest, he explains, ca-

THE NEW MISSIONER

joles. If he reads genuine indifference, he shrugs his shoulders and produces a more tempting vanity.

"Sick in bed," Herries repeated with unction. "Fool! He's helpless as a baby. He can't 'bach' any more than Campbell here."

Frances looked up quickly. "I was wondering why I had not seen him for a day or two. What a pity! I wish," wistfully, "that something could be done; but if you try to help in such cases you're more likely to blunder instead, and do more harm than good."

"Aye," said Campbell suddenly, "unless the Word comes, ye must do nothing. It is hard to learn the lesson to wait, wait, until we are led."

"Poor Evans!" Herries twisted his mouth. "He's so used to being managed; he's no idea how to take care of himself. He's been swaddled too long."

"Ain't he got the nice, kind eyes, though?" said Ethel, straightening her bowed figure, which had been bent over the stove. At the request of Frances, she was preparing coffee and setting out some little cakes. "Kind of patient, dumb eyes, just like a dog's that gets a licking every now and then."

Herries gave one of his loud, discordant peals of laughter. "That's it," slapping his knee. "You hit the nail on the head that time, Ethel; you hit the nail on the head. And if you'll notice, Evans's kind always marry the little, spitfire devils of women, who keep a whip handy and don't scruple to use it."

"Oh, Mis' Evans ain't so worse, now," remonstrated Ethel vaguely, beginning to pour the strong, steam-

CHAPTER FIVE

ing coffee into the cups on the table. "Here's your coffee, Mr. Campbell—oh!" looking earnestly at the quaint, motionless little figure that, with cheek resting on hand, sat staring at the fire. "Don't pay no attention to him," her voice hushed to tenderness and caution; "just let him be."

Herries laid his knife and the various sections of the lamp carefully on the table and took the cup of coffee from her.

"Have ye heard that 'Shock' O'Brien has married the Black Pearl?" he asked Ethel, speaking with casual indifference, but with a sly, avid glance from under his brows, to make sure that she fully appreciated the importance of this next bit of news. "The boys thought he must have been drunk when he did it, but Dan Mayhew saw them in Denver the other day and he says that Shock's plumb crazy about her and that they're coming here to live."

"Is that so?" said Ethel, with a gratifying interest. "My! I've heard of her good and plenty. We was talkin' of Shock marryin' her over at the Garvins' to-day. Walt knows her; he says she's a dream, but kind of queer-like."

"I bet Walt knows her," chuckled Herries.

"I bet," agreed Ethel.

Struck by something in their tones, the Missionary lifted her eyes. "Why do you say that?" she asked.

"I guess Walt knows most of her kind in several States," Herries still chuckled.

Frances turned her puzzled gaze on Ethel. "I

THE NEW MISSIONER

shouldn't wonder," nodded the girl, with indifferent placidity.

"Do you mean——?" asked the Missionary.

"Oh, Walt's easy, you know," explained Ethel. "He's known everywhere for a kind of mark. Anybody can get money out of him."

"Any woman, you mean," corrected Herries. "Men haven't found it so easy."

Frances dropped her sewing in her lap and sat staring meditatively before her, the puzzled expression deepening in her eyes.

"Goodness! You ought to see the box of things Lutie got out from New York this morning!" Ethel's eyes dilated, her cheek flushed. "Oh, say, but they were great! There was a white cloth cloak to wear in the evening, she said—well"—with one long gasp—"it was the grandest thing you ever saw in your life. Why," rising from her chair and using her spoon to indicate effects, "it reached clear to the bottom of her skirt and laid on the ground about two inches behind. It was made to wear with a trail, you know, an' it had first a eight-inch border of Russian sable, an' then the cloth was cut away an' it had an insertion of lace set in this wide"—measuring above her wrist—"an' on each side of that, silver and gold trimming; an' the sleeves was like great long wings. Then there was a hat——"

"It has come." Andrew Campbell's shrunken figure had straightened, his voice rang out deep and musical and exultant, and Ethel stopped short in the full tide

CHAPTER FIVE

of her rapid speech. Her whole face changed. Her eyes became rapt, ecstatic, her lips parted, her lithe figure bent forward as if to listen the better. She was a neophyte, awaiting a revelation.

"I hae puzzled long over the vairse, 'There shall be no more sea.'" The mellow voice echoed through the room, and each word as he spoke it seemed invested with a new and luminous meaning. "I hae wondered long about it, but now, even now, as I sat here, this vanished away, and I found myself in my ain country, and Ruth was with me. Ye ken," turning to Frances with gentle courtesy, "that being no longer in the flesh, she has progressed greatly, and she said that it meant this: that the sea divides the land and is ever a barrier to be crossed, and so it stands as a sign of separation; but, at last, love shall blot it out and there shall be no more parting."

Ethel gazed at him with the tenderest, most awed admiration. "Ain't that grand!" with a catch in her voice. "You certainly are right in the Kingdom of Heaven, Mr. Campbell. Oh," standing with upraised eyes and clasping her hands on her heart, "I wisht we was all there!"

"I hae studied and studied over it," he repeated earnestly, "and waited for Ruth; but it was long before she came. It is sometimes very long before she comes," with a kind of patient pathos. "I tried also to discuss it with Mrs. Landvetter, but," shaking his head pityingly, "the meesteries are withheld from her."

THE NEW MISSIONER

"You bet they are," grinned Herries.

"It must be the whole secret—love," murmured the Missionary, and in her gaze was something of the awe that touched Ethel's face.

Campbell looked at her with surprise in his strangely clear eyes. "Must be? Is!" strongly. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels—though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains—though I give my body to be burned——" he muttered.

Frances continued to look at him, the mystic light that shone always in his eyes kindling in hers.

"Oh, I wish I knew what to do!" she cried. "Why isn't the right word given to me to help Mr. and Mrs. Evans. For the last two Sundays I've tried to preach love and forgiveness, hoping it would melt their hearts; but there they both sat, like two stones, and I knew, I felt, that I was hardening them instead of reaching them."

Herries bent forward and gazed intently at her, his keen face outlined against the lamp-light, the sweep of white hair against the high, narrow brow, the delicately cut, aquiline nose, the crooked mouth with the scornful corners—and Frances, meeting his glance, felt a swift and fleeting impulse of recoil.

"Melt their hearts!" he scoffed. He bent nearer still, holding her with his satirical, piercing eyes. "Why don't you try your woman's wits?" he asked. "The same that you used when you conquered the hosts of the Egyptians, as Campbell says."

CHAPTER FIVE

She shrank back visibly now, and lifted one hand, palm outward, before her eyes. "Oh, don't remind me of that!" There was pain in her voice.

He laughed again. "Why not? What were your wits given you for but to use. That's where you're strong, when you use the methods that come natural to you. You'll never learn to handle any others properly, no matter how hard you try. And you'll never bring Evans and his wife together by preaching love and forgiveness. Pish!" He twisted his mouth awry. "Use your wits!"

Frances sat late that night, thinking.

CHAPTER SIX

EARLY the next morning, long before the sun had begun to make its tardy appearance over the peaks, Frances, with a little covered basket on her arm, walked up the hill to "Old Man Beebee's" cabin, occupied at the present by Silas Evans.

It was a dreary, unpainted little shack, close beside a great slate-coloured ore-dump from one of the mines, while behind it stretched a steeply rising and desolate expanse of bare hillside. The Missionary knocked two or three times, and finally, meeting with no response, lifted the latch and entered. The cabin was cold and still. As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light which fell through the small window, she saw that Evans lay in a profound, if restless, sleep upon a bunk in the corner, his arms tossed above his head, his browned face a sickly clay colour. There was no fire in the broken, rusty stove, no furniture save an old chair and a table covered with a few greasy, battered cooking utensils; the ceaseless mountain wind whistled through the cracks of the rough, board walls—an eerie continuous sigh.

As noiselessly as possible, Frances began to build a fire; but in spite of her precautions Evans roused and, lifting himself on one elbow, gazed at her with dazed eyes, muttering incoherent words. As he gradually

CHAPTER SIX

comprehended her simple explanations of her presence—she was a neighbour and had heard that he was ill—he ventured gruff and shamefaced remonstrance, and would evidently have been well pleased to have her leave him; but, unheeding his protests, she continued to build the fire, tidy up the cabin, and prepare his breakfast in so matter-of-fact a way, with so few words, and a demeanour of such calm cheerfulness, that the wretched and forlorn man was visibly heartened and encouraged. Gradually his nervous apprehension that she might refer to the difficulty between his wife and himself wore away, and when Frances finally left him, with his breakfast on the chair by his side and yesterday's newspaper in his hand, his dreary dejection was unmistakably lightened.

And she, too, walked down the hill with a pleasant sense of satisfaction, almost of exhilaration. The sun had by this time surmounted the peaks and shone in the deep blue sky, the young leaves were fluttering in the breeze, the bluejays and magpies flew from tree to tree. And as Frances drew in great draughts of the delicious air there was a fresh spring to her step and an almost gay light in her eye. She sang a little under her breath as she walked.

But just as she reached her own door and was somewhat reluctantly entering, she heard a footstep behind her on the little bridge, and turning, met Garvin's gaze.

"Good-morning, Mr. Garvin! You were coming to see me? Come in." She threw open the door. "You

THE NEW MISSIONER

have never seen my home since I rented it from you, have you? ”

He did not restrain an exclamation of surprise as he followed her across the threshold. “Why, I never would have known the place! It don’t look much as it did when the boys ‘bached’ here. Well, well, what a woman can do!” He looked about him and then at her, and was struck by the fitness of her surroundings to herself. He was a man with an instinctive love of order and simplicity, and the things which spoke of a disciplined and ordered life appealed to him.

Frances, divesting herself of her hat and coat, had taken a chair opposite him, and now waited to hear his reasons for calling upon her, for this, she felt intuitively, was not the mere conventional visit of landlord to tenant; but whatever the importance of his errand might be, Garvin had apparently forgotten it. He sat gazing absently, if earnestly, at the missionary, noting the full sweep of her dark hair from her brow, the smooth, shining braids at the back of her head, the neat black gown, severe and devoid of ornamentation as a nun’s robe, and the fresh white linen collar at her throat.

He could not understand his first impression of her, could not reconcile it with the varying one of the present. The first night he had seen her she had struck him as a plain, dark, insignificant woman with a pleasing manner. Insignificant! Was it possible that he had ever thought that? Insignificant! With that poise, that composure, which spoke of a perfectly controlled nerv-

CHAPTER SIX

ous energy! And what a picture she made now! Garvin loved pictures. Sitting there in her black gown in the straight chair, the rough, whitewashed wall behind her, and the open window with the muslin curtain fluttering in the spring breeze, the spring sunshine flooding the velvety green leaves and the scarlet blossoms of the geraniums on the sill. There was one crimson cluster just beyond the sweep of her dark hair. He liked the steady directness of her gaze, that clear, pale check. How nice a woman's face was without paint!

"Well, Mr. Garvin?" She was looking at him in some surprise.

"Oh!" starting and flushing darkly. "Oh, I beg your pardon—I—I—got to thinking. Miss Benson, I came to speak to you about Lutie." The harassed lines showed again upon his face. "She's in a bad way, poor girl. She had an attack yesterday, a more violent one than she has yet suffered from, and I telegraphed a lung specialist in Denver last night. He'll be here this morning at twelve and go back on the two o'clock train. I had his answer a short time ago," fingering a yellow slip of paper, "and I thought I would come up here before I went home and ask you if you couldn't come in and see her a few minutes after he's gone, just as if you'd happened to come in of your own accord, you know. Poor girl!" with a sigh. "It's pretty rough on her. I'm hoping the doctor will think she can be moved. I'd take her away at once then. You see, there's so little to amuse and interest her here, and she gets so

THE NEW MISSIONER

tired of everything. That is her disease, of course. She's taken a great fancy to you, Miss Benson. Lutie's only a child, you know."

The words, but far more than the words, the tone, were at once a defence and a plea, and Frances's heart went out to him in sudden, spontaneous gratitude. Then she felt those gentler emotions chill and congeal. Why should he not defend Lutie and plead for her? Was it not through him that the plea and the defence had become a necessity? She remembered the insinuations made by Herries and accepted by Ethel the night before, and gazing at him, she unconsciously followed his previous example and fell to musing. How impossible it was to judge by appearances. Garvin, harassed by anxiety and worn with sleepless nights, looked almost ascetic, and yet, Herries and even Ethel——

"Then you will come?"

It was her turn to start. "Of course," hastily. "I will spend all afternoon with her if she cares to have me."

"Thank you." His gratitude, quietly expressed, was yet so sincere as to be touching. He fingered the cover of a book on the table.

"You are fond of reading?"

"I think so," she replied, raising her candid eyes to his. "I would be if I let myself. I never have much time to read."

"I have a great many books," he said. "I would be pleased to have you feel at perfect liberty to use them. I got a new box last night, but they are mostly scien-

CHAPTER SIX

tific works." He purposely strove to prolong the conversation, the rest that her little room afforded him, the easing of unceasing nervous tension, the content that swept over him, made him realise that he was a desperately tired man.

"You are very fond of reading, are you not?"

He drew his hand across his brow. "Yes—oh, yes. It's about all I care for. I'm a pretty busy man. I've got a lot of interests that require almost constant looking after; but I've got to read, I suppose," with a smile, "that I take my reading as some men do drugs. Well," rising reluctantly, "I must go."

"And I will see Mrs. Garvin this afternoon soon after two."

"Thank you," he said again. "Good-bye."

After he had closed the door behind him Frances sat with her chin on her hand, looking rather vaguely before her. The first time she had seen Garvin she had regarded him as a man with a strong, plain face. Strong it assuredly was; but could a face revealing so much character ever be called plain? It expressed courage, endurance, the power of clear, steady judgment and the focussed will; but there was the cynicism of the eyes, the suggestion of recklessness, or—or hardness, she could not quite define it—about the mouth. It was a face that suggested a thousand histories to her and revealed none. She fancied that he was a man who had once possessed illusions and ideals and had suffered keenly at their departure. She was not a woman, however, who allowed herself much time for dreaming,

THE NEW MISSIONER

and she caught up her sewing with a feeling of impatience at herself. There were other matters that needed her attention far more than a study of Walter Garvin's characteristics. There was the estrangement of the Evanses and the wretched situation of Silas. That was a problem demanding solution.

These were enough to occupy her mind until she set out on her promised visit to Lutie that afternoon; but after crossing her little bridge, she turned back to secure heavier wraps and an umbrella. The sky had grown grey, the air cold, and the clouds were trailing long, fleecy streamers across the foot of the peaks; the wind, too, had risen, and it was with difficulty that she made her way against it to Garvin's door.

Once within, and surrounded by its heavily upholstered splendours, her mind reverted to old Andrew Campbell's phrase—"the palace of his light-o'-love"—cruelly ironical, it seemed to her now, after being admitted into the scarlet and white boudoir with the Watteau young men and maidens and the merry cardinals smiling from the walls. The room was full of the odour of stimulants, and high among her scarlet cushions lay the poor, fading light-o'-love, her feeble flame almost snuffed out. At first sight of her, Frances barely repressed an exclamation. She was like some ghastly mummer in a morbid masquerade, Death leading the dance, with roses crowning his skull and his jaws fixed in a grin of terrible mirth.

In honour of the great specialist who had journeyed up to see her for an incredible fee, Lutie had decked

CHAPTER SIX

herself as if for a ball. A delicate pink robe fell about her in long folds, elaborately embroidered with a border of apple blossoms, and from this depended a foam of laces that a duchess might envy. Her hair, dressed by Ethel's hands, was piled high on her head, and in it sparkled diamonds which dazzled the eye with their white blaze. About her wasted throat and all over the bosom of her gown were gleaming jewels; but they were scarcely more glittering than her eyes, and the hectic flush of fever flamed under the paint that lay thick on her sunken cheeks.

As Frances entered she ceased to finger the long rope of jewels about her neck and turned to her guest with an eager joy.

"My Lord! But I'm glad to see you," she cried, struggling to rise, and then falling back on her pillows. "They've bothered the life out of me to-day," fretfully. "Walt," with a kind of impatient pride, "got frightened about me because he didn't think I was improving as fast as I ought to, and nothing would do but he had to telegraph for Adams down to Denver. Crazy! I'm gettin' better every day. Adams was an awful nice man, though. He told me all about the opera and the theatres and all, and he says there ain't a society woman in Denver that's got jewels that can touch mine. Oh, how nice you feel!" She held Frances's cool, firm hands between her own moist, restless palms, and then laid them against her fevered cheek. "Oh, you don't know how you rest me! I can breathe easier the minute you come into the room."

THE NEW MISSIONER

"Then rest," urged Frances, drawing a chair beside her. "I shall be here for two or three hours. Try and sleep a little, Lutie."

"I believe I could, if you sit right there. I feel sort of restless, and yet—I'm—so—tired," Lutie's eyes drooped heavily. Then she reached out, and again clutching Frances's hand laid it against her cheek. From time to time she broke her increasing drowsiness with muttered phrases; but at last she slept—more or less fitfully, for perhaps an hour. Frances's arm grew numb to the shoulder, but still she sat motionless as a statue. Suddenly Lutie awoke with a nervous start, a look of fright in her eyes. "Oh!" with a sigh of relief. "I thought you'd gone. I guess I dreamed it. Well, I feel better. Say," with a return of animation, "did I tell you that that big doctor said there wasn't a woman in Denver had stones that's a patch on mine? He ought to know, oughtn't he? I guess if he only knew it, there's mighty few of 'em that's got the clothes I got, either. Did Ethel tell you about the big box that come the other night? Hats and evening wraps an' dresses an' everything. Ethel went crazy over 'em, like she always does, an' then she remembered her conscience and wouldn't look at them any more. I call that silly, don't you? I wish Walt would come, I want him to show you some of 'em. You know there's been an almost complete alteration in the styles this spring. If Walt was only here! I don't like those Chinamen to handle them with their dirty fingers."

It was evident that nothing really interested her but

CHAPTER SIX

her frocks and jewels. It was as though, in the decline of her physical strength, some fierce and counter-acting energy gained life, expressing itself in this strange persistence of frivolous and futile passions.

Frances, who had little knowledge of toilettes and less interest in them, regarded it as a phase of disease and listened patiently. Presently, in the midst of these broken and gasping descriptions, the door opened softly and Angel entered, her elaborate and expensive frock, as usual, mud-splashed and torn.

"For pity's sake!" exclaimed her mother. "At last! Well, I think it's about time. Miss Benson, she hasn't been near me for two whole days. Now, what do you think of that? Come here."

Angel paid no more heed to this request than if it had not been voiced, but walked over and stood before the Missionary, regarding her steadily with her limpid eyes. She had evidently just come in from the open air. Her brown curls were tossed over her head, the colour of wild roses was on her cheek, and she bore into the drug-laden chamber the fresh fragrance of all out-doors.

"Where's Lambie?" asked Frances politely, to open the conversation.

"I don't know," she replied indifferently. "Hunting or fishing, I guess. He told me dis morning he wouldn't be back all day, not till evening."

"Now, Angel, don't tell lies," admonished Lutie.

"He did," affirmed the child. She looked at Frances with inscrutable eyes, which suddenly became incred-

THE NEW MISSIONER

ibly sly, and thrust a pointed, pink tongue between her teeth; her whole expression seemed full of feline suggestion. "He says, 'Miew-ow-ow.'"

The Missionary was so plainly taken aback by this uncanny exhibition that Angel, feeling the gratification of the artist at the effect produced, was stirred to fresh efforts.

"Wang talks sis way." Her eyes narrowed and seemed to slant upward, her mouth became a slit, she swayed her head slightly to and fro after the manner of Wang, and poured forth a flood of "pidgin English," with every intonation faultlessly reproduced.

Frances and her mother both burst into laughter.

"Did you ever see such a mimic?" asked Lutie. "And she'll hardly ever show off, either. Come, Angel, now you're started, show how old Campbell looks and talks."

Angel was in one of her rare, complaisant moods, and, ruffling her curls over her brow and cheeks, she peered from this mass of simulated whiskers, while from her baby lips rang a curiously exact representation of the old man's rich, bell-like tones. She even drew a chair opposite Frances, and seating herself, leaned forward, thrusting out her lower jaw, and drawing down the corners of her mouth until it assumed bitter curves, a harsh laugh meanwhile issuing from her lips; "Mr. Herries," she announced, although Frances needed no explanation.

"Ain't she a wonder!" said her mother with pride. "My! you ought to seen her the other day. Mis'

CHAPTER SIX

Nitschkan was here, and Angel just sat and stared at her like she was fascinated. Well, after Nitschkan had gone, that child took her off, and I d'clare, you couldn't have told that the old gipsy wasn't in the room. An' she's got a memory a yard long. She can remember everything she hears. I tell you what, that kid's going to be an actress—one of the real headliners—ain't you, Angel? With her looks, and her talent, and all Walt can give her, I bet she'll live on Easy Street all her life, even if her mother didn't—what's that?" nervously, as a soft whining and scratching at the door became audible. "Now, Angel, don't you let any of your beasts in here."

Angel listened intently a moment. "It's White Puppy," she said. "I know his scratch. He wants me to come out. He talks to me sis way: 'Bow-wow!'" She barked and whined a second like a little dog, eyeing Frances the while with an elfin malice and mischief; then apparently satisfied with the astonishment and appreciation of her audience, she yielded to the insistent demands for her presence on the other side of the door and joined the only companion for which she ever showed anything approaching affection.

Frances, too, arose, as the afternoon was growing late, and there was still something she intended to do.

"You're awful good to stay with me so long," said Lutie gratefully. "You'll come often, won't you? Why, Miss Benson, I just felt drawn to you the first moment I saw you; but you didn't like me at first, did you? No," shaking her head, "you didn't. You kind

THE NEW MISSIONER

o' drew back from me, I could see it. I suppose," with the effort to appreciate another point of view, "that to anyone that looks at things like you got to, being a Missionary—it seems awful for people not to be married. I suppose you couldn't help blaming me."

She spoke with a pathos which revealed that she knew the deep, eternal, feminine anguish of being her sex's scorn; and in an illuminating flash, Frances realised that her pride in her laces and jewels—all her flaunting possessions—lay deeper than mere trivial vanity. She prized and clung to them because they served to restore her self-esteem, and in a measure effected her social rehabilitation. She was but following, unconsciously perhaps, her feminine instinct for retaliation, and on the only lines which might avail. If condemned, she would also be envied.

"Oh, Lutie; poor, dear Lutie, I never blamed you!" Frances knelt beside her and held her thin hands closely in hers. "Never." Her eyes glowed sombrely, her mouth shut in a hard line. There were hot rebellion and resentment in her heart. She seemed to see a long, an unending line of Luties, butterflies with the iridescent dust brushed rudely from their torn and bedraggled wings, those gossamer wings made to float on sunbeams.

"I blame him," she cried involuntarily.

"Not Walt?" Lutie dragged away her hands and struggled to a half-sitting position. "I guess you're on the wrong tack. Huh," with a short laugh, "you don't know Walt, nor what he took me from. You

CHAPTER SIX

ain't got an idea how Angel and me happen to be here. Why, while Walt was down prospecting in Nevada, he was dickering with my husband for a mine. He stopped at our cabin, and I cooked for 'em, so, of course, I saw a good deal of him." She paused a moment, her eyes dilating curiously, as she gazed into that past whence she had escaped; then, with a hard little laugh, she went on: "I could tell you things that'd make you sit up and take notice, Missioner, about what my life was; but what's the use? Put it all in a nutshell and let it go at one word—hell. I was beginning to get sick even then, and one day Walt come in and found me, all knocked black and blue. Well, you ought to seen him! He wasted no time in tying on my hat and cloak, and the same for Angel, and he says: 'I can't stand it any longer, Lutie. You and the child got to come with me, and come now!' Say, I can hear the whistle of that train yet—'way, far in the distance, and when we got on and fairly started and Walt put some pillows round me in the seat, I knew I was in heaven. I can't think of heaven in any other way—just that little old parlour car. We went to Southern California, and we certainly had an awful fine time. Walt bought me jewels and everything, and I always did love pretty things, but I didn't seem to get well. The doctors said it would take a long time, 'cause I'd had such bad treatment. But do you know, Miss Benson," lifting piteous eyes, "I ain't never spoke of this to anybody but you; I don't even like to think of it, 'cause it makes me so unhappy; but even at first, spite of his being so good to me and

THE NEW MISSIONER

all, I had a kind of an idea that Walt didn't really love me. I don't believe he really loves me now; he just feels sorry for me." She threw her arms out upon the pillow, and burying her face in them, sobbed.

"Lutie, Lutie," soothed Frances, her whole heart going out to the bruised, dependent creature. "He does love you—I know it. You get such ideas because you are ill. It's just a sick fancy."

"Maybe," sighed Lutie. "But you'll come to-morrow? Promise."

"I'll come whenever you want me."

"Listen!" exclaimed Lutie, lifting her head. "That's Walt's step." She carefully wiped away all traces of tears, her handkerchief showing, as a result, heavy smears of rouge. "He's just come down from the mines."

In verification of her words, Garvin entered presently in his high boots and corduroys. His worn face brightened when he saw Frances still there.

"Miss Benson, it is good of you to come in and cheer up Lutie while I had to be away." He shook hands with her, exchanging a smile of mutual comprehension over their innocent deception, although, to do the Missionary justice, hers was faintly deprecating.

"Wasn't it?" smiled Lutie. "Say, Walt," with pouting coquetry, "you ain't noticed my swell get-up."

"Goodness! You're fine!" admired Garvin. "And all your jewels! You must have been trying to dazzle the doctor, weren't you? Oh, that dress 's a beauty!"

CHAPTER SIX

"Did you notice the apple blossoms and the lace?" she asked eagerly.

He lifted a corner of the robe and examined the delicately embroidered flowers. "They're great, aren't they? Sure, they're not real?" affecting to smell them.

"Oh, Walt, ain't you crazy!" she laughed delightedly. "And the lace—you ought to scold me about that lace, Walt. It cost twenty-five hundred dollars. But that's nothing to you, is it?"

"No," he replied laconically, "that's nothing. You can't spend it as fast as it pours in, child, no matter how hard you try."

His face had fallen again into its sad, granite-like repose, and Frances apprehended in some way that he brooded over the thought of how little his wealth could really bring him. Meeting her glance suddenly, he smiled, and then gazed at her keenly. She looked a little tired. "Come, Miss Benson," he said, rising, "I want you to see my library; Lutie has been exhibiting her jewels, now I want you to see mine*."

"Yes, go," urged Lutie. "Maybe you like books; I don't care much about them, except some of the picture magazines."

As Frances and Garvin walked down the hall together to his library, she felt a new respect and a real admiration for him. His kindness toward Lutie, his unfailing tenderness and patience with her, aroused a sentiment of vicarious gratitude in the Missionary's heart, and she showed her change of feeling by cast-

THE NEW MISSIONER

ing aside the rather cold reserve of manner with which she had formerly met him.

“Does the doctor think Lutie can be moved?” she asked in a low voice just as they reached the library door.

He shook his head. “He considers her worse even than I feared,” he sadly replied. “He has ordered a change of treatment, however, and will be up again in a few days’ time. But you have had enough to bother you to-day. Come.”

The library was a large and lofty room, austere furnished in dark leather, with walls almost completely covered with bookshelves, beginning at the floor and running up to the ceiling; the tables, too, were covered with books, papers, and the graver reviews.

Frances could not fail to notice that, here in his own domain, Garvin became a different man; the weariness vanished from his face, his whole expression lightened and brightened, he was alert and interested. He showed her his various editions with an affectionate pride, handling them lovingly, as he explained their beauties to her, and she, listening with rapt attention, felt as if the gates of a new world had opened to her—the calm, lofty, secluded world of the intellect.

Here was evidently Garvin’s real treasure, and here, too, was his heart. This library of his was a source of riches to him, beside which the yellow stream which ran from his golden treasure-houses in the bowels of the earth afforded him no commensurate return.

“I love to hear about these things,” cried Frances,

CHAPTER SIX

with one of her rare outbursts of enthusiasm. "I—I am very ignorant. I've been too busy always to read much."

"As I told you this morning," he said, evidently gratified by her pleasure, "I am delighted to have you come here and read, or take any of the books as often as you choose."

"Thank you." She held out her hand with one of her attractive smiles. "I must go now. I have stayed far longer than I should. I have a matter on hand which must be attended to to-night."

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT was as wild an evening as the afternoon had seemed to presage; the rain was falling in fitful dashes, and the mountain wind was piercingly keen. Frances, however, did not follow her inclination and hasten on to the warm solitude of her cabin; but with her mission firmly in mind, turned up the road toward the home of Mrs. Evans.

After she had knocked at the door and been admitted by one of the children, she found to her relief that Mrs. Evans had also just reached home after her trip to the station and was divesting herself of the heavy wraps she had worn as a protection against the weather. This emotion was speedily mitigated by the sight of Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Landvetter, and Mrs. Nitschkan sitting comfortably about the stove, sipping coffee and engaged in the pleasure of unrestrained and unhampered conversation possible to such well-cemented intimacies.

"Why, Miss Benson!" called Mrs. Evans from an inner room, overhearing the polite and even effusive greeting accorded Frances by the ladies about the fire. "This is sure good of you to come in such a day. Eolanthé, set up a chair for Miss Benson. I'll be out in a second."

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Well, if this ain't a sight for sore eyes," cooed Mrs. Thomas affectionately. "Let me help you off with your gums, Missioner."

"It sure is," agreed Mrs. Nitschkan breezily. "What you want's a steamin' cup of coffee, Missioner; sugar an' cream?" proceeding to pour the strong coffee into a cup, with a necessary accompaniment of noise.

"It vas an awful day, vasn't it?" asked Mrs. Landvetter, looking up from her lace needles and adding her mite to the general cordiality.

"Pretty bad," replied the Missionary, taking a seat, and picking up the baby who had toddled to meet her; "but it's so cheerful in here that you soon forget the weather outside."

"My! I just got soaked to the skin driving up from the station," continued the voice from an inner chamber. "Wait till I get some of these duds off and some dry ones on, and I'll be right out. Celora, did you keep up the fire in the kitchen while I was gone? I wisht you'd stay for supper, Miss Benson; not that there's anything to tempt you, Lord knows; but why can't you stay and take potluck with me and the children? The other ladies say they got to go on."

Frances reflected a moment. This was evidently her opportunity. "I will be glad to," she replied, "if you won't go to any trouble for me."

"It's no trouble, I assure you, Miss Benson." Mrs. Evans, trim as a neat brown wren, appeared and took her place in the circle about the fire. "How would you

THE NEW MISSIONER

like some muffins? Now, I'm ready to sit down and chat. Celora, you can break some eggs for mommie."

"Missioner, I seen you goin' to Walt Garvin's this afternoon. What did that big doctor say about Lutie?" asked Mrs. Nitschkan eagerly.

"Yes, dat's vat ve all vant to know," muttered Mrs. Landvetter.

"I didn't see the doctor," returned Frances non-committally.

The ladies understood that further questioning was unnecessary.

"I'm a givin' her about a month more," affirmed Mrs. Nitschkan, with finality.

"I guess." Mrs. Landvetter slowly shook her head.

Mrs. Thomas sighed heavily. "Ethel says she ain't made no preparations at all. She don't think of one thing but clothes and such, and you all know that nothin' could be perishinger. Ethel feels awful about her unpreparedness; she says she can't sleep at night for thinkin' of it, and she feels all the time like she's called to be a instrument; so the other day, she drug old man Campbell to see Lutie. She reasoned that if he could do what he done for her, he could save a stick or a stone.

"Well, that very same evening, she come into our house cryin' to beat the band. She says that one of Campbell's despairin' spells was comin' on, only she didn't know it, and that after she got him in that red room of the Garvin's he seemed kind o' dazed. He just set there with his wild eyes fixed on Lutie, an' never

CHAPTER SEVEN

so much as sayin' one word of comfort or exhortation, jus' every once in a while, he'd hiss out somethin' about Jezebel, or the daughters of Babylon, an' 'wailin' an' gnashin' of teeth.'

"An' while she was doin' her best to get him on another tack, in come that devil child, Angel, an' mocked him to his face, so's you couldn't tell which was which. Well, as a result, Lutie got to laughin' an' cryin' all at once, an' run right into the 'strikes'; an' she clutched hold of Ethel an' screamed: 'Take him away! take him away! he's crazy. Walt! Walt! Walt!' an' Walt run in an' drove 'em all right out. Oh, it must have been something fierce. Ethel was all broke up, I can tell you; but she ain't goin' to back out. She says to me to-day: 'It 'most looks like I got to fight the Devil single-handed for Lutie's soul; but I ain't goin' to let her die in her sins,' she says.

"I tried to cheer her up the best I could. I says: 'Well, Ethel, you never know what means the Lord's goin' to take. Maybe somebody'll go to raisin' a rough-house somewheres an' put a bullet through one or two of her husbands, an' then Walt can marry her at the eleventh hour.' I told that to Ethel to cheer her up; but I couldn't put much faith in it myself. Things don't happen that slick." Mrs. Thomas sighed more heavily than before, and peered into the depths of her coffee cup with as much of an expression of tragedy as her soft, indefinite features could assume.

"What's the matter, Marthy?" inquired Mrs. Nitschkan robustly. "You ain't got nothin' to bother

THE NEW MISSIONER

about except how to spend that two thousand Seth left you to do as you please with."

"Dere's only one way to spend it," chuckled Mrs. Landvetter; "put it down in your stockin' an' keep it there."

"Listen to old Mis' Miser," scoffed Mrs. Evans. "Well, Marthy, what are you goin' to do with it?"

"I'm a thinkin' of doin' up the parlour," scanning the faces of her friends for signs of approval.

"Gosh a'mighty!" murmured Mrs. Nitschkan, with a portentous yawn. "I wouldn't waste good money that-a-way. Get yourself a horse an' cart, pile the kids in an' jant around havin' a good time. You'd better believe I would. I'd bake up a mess of meat turn-overs and doughnuts, and the Devil could go a-courtin' for all of me. I'd have a picnic every day in the year."

"Ah, shut up, Nitschkan!" said Mrs. Evans. "Don't go puttin' such ideas in Mis' Thomas's head. Every woman don't want to go a-gipsyin' like you. Some of us has got a little respectability and domestication. You go ahead, Marthy, an' get your parlour fixed up. Have some style about you, an' for the land's sake, whitewash the kitchen ceiling; it's scaling something fierce."

"You'd get more fun out of a horse and cart," Mrs. Nitschkan asserted, a teasing gleam in her small bright eyes.

"Maybe you would." Mrs. Evans emphasised the pronoun; "but it wouldn't make no show when folks come to the house. You know everybody'll want to know

CHAPTER SEVEN

what you done with Thomas's insurance," speaking authoritatively to Mrs. Thomas, "an' you know yourself it'll look frivolous to show them a horse an' a cart, with the house needin' paint, and the nap all off the plush in the parlour set, an' the pillow shams on the parlour bed only scalloped, not a shred of lace on 'em. It wouldn't look right honest, Mis' Thomas, when Thomas done so well by you an' left you all that he did."

In truth, Thomas had electrified Zenith by leaving to his widow what was regarded in that remote village as a comfortable fortune, for he had been one who had enjoyed a bout with the earth for its fruits; and what he had gained he clutched tight from the grasp of his seeking fellows.

The estate then of which Mrs. Thomas was the important, if depressed, legatee, comprised a half interest in the "Zenobia," a prospect with an excellent showing on Eureka Mountain; a patch of land down in the valley which was devoted to melon culture, and three well-rented houses on Sunshine Avenue. This property was left in trust for the widow and the children in the hands of Dan Mayhew, the village lawyer and notary public; but a life insurance of two thousand dollars was bequeathed exclusively to Mrs. Thomas, to be used as she saw fit, and it was the proper disposal of this sum which was at present troubling her vague and unpractical soul.

"I'll tell you what," said Mrs. Nitschkan, rising to her feet and buttoning her coat about her; "I'll be

THE NEW MISSIONER

honest, woman dear, and tell the truth. I never had no use for Thomas in life. I can see him yet, lookin' at me with that black, twisted smile of his'n and sayin' things that you couldn't 'a' helped swattin' him for if he'd had his lights.

"That hole where his lungs ought to have been was all that saved him from me again and again; but I do say this, and I'll say it loud enough for everyone to hear, that the way he's left you, woman dear, is an example to every man in the camp. Maybe you think I ain't rubbed it into Jack."

She but voiced the universal feminine sentiment in Zenith. There had been no hesitation, no slack work in the endeavour to rub it into every separate Jack.

"Well, it's time we was moving on. Pull yourself out of that chair, Landvetter. Come, Marthy. Stop in soon an' see me, Missioner."

"And me," echoed Mrs. Thomas.

"Und me," from Mrs. Landvetter.

"Say, Missioner," said Mrs. Evans, after she had returned from seeing her guests to the front door, "I was tellin' the girls just before you come in, a preacher come to camp to-night. I drove him up to the Thorn House a while back. He's a lunger, of course. I told him about you, and he says he was goin' to call on you to-morrow. He's a tall, spindlin' fellow, kind of meek-looking; sort of nice, too."

Frances looked up with considerable interest. "That will be very nice," she said. "Perhaps he will help with the Sunday school and preach occasionally. That will

CHAPTER SEVEN

give you a chance to hear some real sermons. That is, if he is well enough to preach."

"Oh, I guess so; his voice sounded strong; but, Missioner," looking meditatively at her guest, with a softening of her bead-like eyes, "your preachin's good enough for us; it's real comfortin' and helpful."

"Oh, I can't preach." Francis drew back in genuine humility and coloured deeply. "I can only talk a little of the things that have helped me, and that I think may help some of you; but to really preach—why, Mrs. Evans, I couldn't."

"Well, call it what you please," amiably, "it suits me. Oh, say, Missioner," her quick mind flying off in another direction, "Shock O'Brien and his wife come yesterday."

"Did they?" responded Frances.

"Yes, I drove 'em up from the station; but that's all the good it did me. I got neither sight nor sound of her. Shock was like a kid, he almost hugged me, an' then introduced her; but she jus' bowed, as stiff as you please. Her face was all tied up in a veil an' she had on one of them big, loose coats, an' I couldn't tell no more'n the man in the moon what she looked like.

"They've taken that nice little frame house of Marthy Thomas's on Sunshine Ayenue, and Shock was out paintin' it this morning. It'll seem funny to see a painted house in Zenith, won't it?

"The boys that seen this here 'Black Pearl,' as they call her, says she's a beauty."

"Is she?" said Frances dreamily, and evidencing no

THE NEW MISSIONER

especial interest. Indeed, she scarcely heard; her mind was busy with the problem before her, the task she had set herself to perform.

The rain drove wildly against the windows, the wind shrieked about the house, and Frances thought of Silas Evans in his lonely cabin, and nerved herself to speech. Moistening her lips nervously, once or twice, she drove, as was her wont, straight at the subject she had in mind.

"Mrs. Evans," looking steadily at her hostess, "I saw Mr. Evans to-day."

The tiny woman she addressed drew herself up with a hauteur worthy of a duchess. "Eolanthé," to the child who leaned against her knee, "run and get mimmie a pail of water from the well. Now, Miss Benson," turning to the Missionary with flashing eyes, "there is some subjects that I can't feel had better be discussed. Sile Evans is one of them."

Frances's dark eyes dwelt on the fire a moment, a puzzled expression in their depths; then she turned to Mrs. Evans with a pleading embarrassment of manner, foreign to her usual composure.

"Oh, I wish I could get some light!" she cried, clasping her hands tight together. "I've prayed and prayed for light about this matter, but none has been vouchsafed me. I know that it is entirely your own affair, and that I haven't a particle of call to meddle; but oh!—the hardest thing about right is to be sure that it is right, and not an unwarrantable interference in someone's else business. When I lie awake at night



*She turned to Mrs. Evans with a pleading embarrassment
of manner*

CHAPTER SEVEN

and bother over my sins, it's not the bad things I've done that torment me, it's the way I've meddled in other folk's business, trying to do them good, and Satan only knows all the harm I've done."

Mrs. Evans's eyes hardened. She carefully untied her apron and then tied it again with an air of unalterable resolution.

"We might just as well settle this matter now, Miss Benson," she said crisply, "an' then we'll have it over an' done with. I don't take no steps without first considering them, and when I decide a thing, I decide it. I ain't one to do a thing and then wish I hadn't. What I do, I do once an' fer all, an' I guess Sile Evans knows that well enough without comin' whining to you."

"Oh, Mrs. Evans!" exclaimed Frances, "you mustn't think that—indeed, you mustn't. He never said a word about you—never. But I couldn't help feeling sorry for him. No woman could."

She paused a moment, seeing Mrs. Evans's face grow colder and more resentful; and in that moment, Herries' words of the night before came to her like a message—"Use your woman's wits. You are only strong when you employ the weapons that come natural to you!"

Last night she had rejected the suggestion as unworthy. To-day, in view of the immediate circumstances, it seemed legitimate, even Heaven-sent. Her chin lifted slightly, her eyes had quickened with that exultant consciousness of power that came to her in such moments. She drew a long breath, and without

THE NEW MISSIONER

altering her position or unclasping her folded hands, her figure seemed in some subtle way to become informed with authority. It was woman to woman now, woman who knew instinctively how to reach her own sex and meant consciously and completely to use that knowledge.

"You know," Frances's voice was low and even, "what that wretched little cabin is, where the boards don't meet by half an inch. There was his poor bunk in the corner, with the thin, torn bedding, the broken-down stove and no fire in it, the rusty, dirty pots and pans. It all looked so wretched for a man like him. You've always made him so comfortable that he's helpless when it comes to taking care of himself. He has a dreadful cold, and he seemed so sick and forlorn that I just had to come to you."

Mrs. Evans again untied her apron and this time cast it from her. "For the land's sake, Miss Benson," with visible impatience, "I'd 'a' thought you might at least have turned in and washed the dishes for him."

"Why, no," hesitated Frances, pursuing her design, "I would not have liked to suggest it."

Mrs. Evans gave a short laugh. "Well, all I can say is that Christianity seems a mighty funny thing now-a-days. Sile is not used to baching and he never was handy. I should think common charity would have made you want to clean up a bit."

She took the bowl of muffin batter from the child at the table and began to beat it furiously. "Celora, set the table right off, an' for Heaven's sake, take Rupert

CHAPTER SEVEN

Hentzau out of my way! I never see such a child for gettin' under your feet. What kind of a bed did you say Sile was sleepin' on, Miss Benson? Just a cot under the window, and torn bed-clothes, eh? Old man Beebee's, I'll be bound, an' nobody ever did rightly know what the old man died of. In under the window, too. Well, Miss Benson," bitterly, "I should think for a perfessor like you, your conscience would be kind of sore this evening. Did you say Sile had a cold?"

"I noticed how hoarse he was and asked him about it," replied Frances meekly. She might have justly resented Mrs. Evans's tone and manner; but the heart of woman knew the heart of woman, and recognised the primitive voice. "He said that he had been suffering from a severe cold and indigestion."

"What kind of a cold was it?" standing with arms akimbo, "in his head or on his chest?"

"He seemed very hoarse, he could hardly speak."

"For pity's sake! I'll tell you what it is, he's caught his death sleepin' up there in that tumble-down cabin on old man Beebee's bed, an' starvin' himself to death. He can't cook no more than Rupert Hentzau, an' now he's got a cold on his lungs. It means pleurisy to-night as sure as fate. Celora, get me the cough mixture from the top shelf of the closet under the stairs, an' the covered basket. An' you never done a thing for him, Miss Benson? Well, I guess I've seen enough of what they call, 'the missionary sperit' to last me quite a while."

"You were my friend," said Frances, slowly.

Mrs. Evans cocked her head scornfully. "I don't

THE NEW MISSIONER

think it's no time to be talkin' that way, Miss Benson, when a human being's at the point of death. And let me tell you, that you nor nobody else in this village is in any position to judge Silas Evans. If there ever was a good man it's him; the kindest, truest, best husband that any woman ever had; and just because he's had a streak of hard luck, everybody's against him. It makes me sick!"

"But the children!" cried Frances, shooting the last arrow in her quiver, as she watched her hostess tie on a hood and slip into a jacket. "Surely, you are not going out on such a night as this!"

Mrs. Evans gave her one glance of unspeakable contempt. "I guess I don't need no old maid to tell me my duty as a married woman," icily. "Let me pass, if you please." But at the door, she paused with her hand on the latch, and looked backward. "I would take it kindly," she said, "if you'd look after the kids till Sile and I get back."

And the Missionary prepared supper and played with the children, with a song in her heart. She had paid the first instalment on a debt.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE news of the reconciliation between Evans and his wife was quickly spread through the village, and after a due discussion of all data bearing on the case, Zenith felt itself at liberty to devote its entire attention to the two recent arrivals, the Reverend Hugh Carrothers, habitually referred to as "the lunger preacher," and Mrs. Jacques O'Brien, commonly known to fame as "The Black Pearl."

The consensus of feminine opinion as expressed at a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society, was that Mrs. O'Brien was in reality not half so beautiful as glowing and overdrawn masculine accounts had portrayed her; was, in fact, not beautiful at all, and that her manifold and much-heralded charms were merely a figment of man's erratic and incomprehensible imagination.

And to the surprise of a community to which nothing that was covered was not ultimately revealed, and which entered freely and familiarly at back doors, she failed to comport herself in the spectacular manner which might be hoped from a lady who bore so paradoxical a *nom de guerre*, and so vivid a past. In fact, to Zenith's intense disappointment, a mild and flavourless domesticity seemed her prevailing trait. She proved herself a skilled cook and housekeeper, excelling even Mrs. Evans in certain household art; she even devoted her-

THE NEW MISSIONER

self to so tepid an amusement as gardening, and, as the summer advanced, her main interest seemed to be in the little patch of ground before her doors. There she hoed, and weeded, and pruned, and planted all summer long among the strangely scentless and brilliant flowers she loved, preferring this occupation to any others offered, and others more alluring to the feminine imagination were offered, for contrary to some opinions, she had achieved a social position at once, accepting all overtures as her due, but never seeking them; in fact so impressive was her indifference and the general dignity of her demeanour, that she was unanimously elected to membership in the Aid Society without one dissenting vote.

Frances never forgot the first time she saw "The Pearl." She was standing with her elbows on the post of a white paling gate, gazing out at the mountains darkly defined against the gold of the sunset sky. Behind her was a garden flaring with the scarlet and yellow flowers which had just been set out, and a cottage brave in fresh paint. In the Zenith of straggling, unpainted cabins, yards adorned with tin cans, broken crockery, and stray bits of wire, the neat vividness of house and garden presented a pictorial and artificial effect, toy-like in its setting of austere and gloomy mountains; but if the little dwelling seemed the expression of a primitive and childlike imagination, the woman who leaned upon the gate was real.

She had been standing quite still for a long time, her gaze fixed on the mountains, her face held in the cup

CHAPTER EIGHT

of her hands, a long, narrow, white face, with dark eyes and arched brows, which gave her a wistful and rather startled expression; but her hair added a touch of incongruity to her whole appearance, an exotic hint of some marked dissonance and inharmony of character. Densely black at the roots and about the nape of the neck, the mass twisted about her head was a strange, burnt-umber, with broad strands, as yellow as corn, running through it, evidently coloured by a natural process, bleached by burning suns.

Her husband was spading a bit of the garden behind, and Frances looked at him with a deepening of the curiosity she found it impossible not to feel in this much-discussed pair. She thought him far handsomer than the wife; the lithe elegance of the Latin races was in his carriage, his features suggested a French vivacity and insouciance; but the grey eyes of his Irish father shone in his weak, emotional, beautiful face.

So much for a first impression of the O'Briens on the Missionary's mind. Now for the Rev. Hugh Carrothers. On the whole, he tallied admirably with Mrs. Evans's description of him. He was a tall, thin fellow of about thirty years of age, with a gentle, rather timid face, and mild wondering eyes. In coming to Zenith, he had had no intention of trying to wrest from the Missionary her charge; but had merely followed the advice of his physician and sought the higher altitudes and the occupation of manual labour, in an endeavour to recuperate from a severe illness.

He had eagerly accepted Frances's invitation to

THE NEW MISSIONER

preach on the first Sunday after his arrival in Zenith, and on that occasion every bench in the weather-beaten, unpainted little frame church was occupied, not so much for the sake of profiting by his discourse as from a desire to size up, as it were, the man; to photograph through the mental lenses the least variation of facial expression, the slightest peculiarity of speech or manner, that one might be able creditably to hold one's own in the inevitable and exhaustive discussion of personal traits and mental equipment.

To the casual observer, the congregation might have appeared but a meagre gathering; but to the practised village eye, capable of comparing it to the ordinary Sunday assemblage, it was of astonishing proportions, for the inhabitants of Zenith were not wont to take the keen edge off the pleasure of church attendance by a too frequent indulgence in its privileges.

"My!" lisped Mrs. Thomas, hastening to join her friends as the congregation slowly filed out of the church, and throwing back from her face, her most cherished possession—her new crepe veil—"Wasn't he great? I do like it when they begin to talk about the serene Emberson and the weighty Carlyle. Now, Missioner, she's always handin' out our plain duty to us, an' I mus' say I get tired of it. As I says to a gentleman from over to Mount Tabor that was callin' on me the other night, I says, 'There's other things in life besides plain duty.'"

"I ain't so crazy about him as some," announced Mrs. Evans, speaking as one from whom a somewhat critical

CHAPTER EIGHT

opinion would be expected, and with due importance, for she had invited Carrothers to take dinner in her now united home, and stood by the side of the dusty, mountain road awaiting his arrival. "When he kep' shout-in', 'Boys, stay on the farm!' I couldn't hardly sit still in my seat. Lord knows we can't even raise potatoes on these rocks! But Dan Mayhew tells me that he's deposited at the Mount Tabor bank, had money left him by his folks. He's a widower, girls. His wife's only been dead a year an' that's the best time to ketch 'em. Now, I was thinkin' all through the sermon: there's my niece, Susie Hazen, over to Red Fox. She's a good, steady girl, has kep' house for her Paw ever since her Maw died. She's plain an' dresses sober, an' wouldn't stir up no envy in any congregation he might get after his lungs are cured up. Anyway, I don't want that Tom Eagen hangin' around her."

Mrs. Nitschkan, her Sunday attire unchanged from its week-day masculine simplicity, snapped her fingers in sturdy contempt: "My patience! You won't find one of them serious moon-gazers of men that ever run after the plain, steady kind. They're took in every time by some flighty, sassy bit of uselessness."

"Yes, Mis' Evans," corroborated Mrs. Thomas with a serpent-like wisdom born of an extensive knowledge of the masculine heart: "You just watch. You can dangle Susie before his eyes all you're a mind to; but all that he'll see'll be Myrtie Swanstrom. Times when he was prayin' most fervent this mornin', I noticed that he kep' peekin' through his eyelashes at Myrtie. Maybe,

THE NEW MISSIONER

you saw her sittin' there in her new white dress that she's been breakin' her fingers to get done. There she sat, her that hadn't darkened the church door for months, lookin' like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

"Myrtie's entirely too enterprisin'," commented Mrs. Evans shortly. "She's got a plenty beaux now. Susie's goin' to have this chance."

Meanwhile, the unconscious object of this discussion, the Rev. Hugh Carrothers, had lingered to assist Miss Benson in gathering up the hymn books and closing and locking the windows and door of the church. These tasks accomplished, he hastened to join the little group by the roadside, and turn with them into the trail through the pines, which, Mrs. Evans explained, was a short cut to her door.

As he walked, he looked about him with eyes which had not lost their first delight in the majestic panorama of the mountains. Almost in a night, a delicate veil of blossoms had covered the bare, rocky hillsides, and at every step one trod on flowers. With a new and ever increasing enjoyment, the preacher gazed about him, and inhaled the pure, balsamic air, with its rich fragrance of the earth and the pines. Naturally, his enjoyment found expression, and he voiced his admiration of the village site. "Ah, ladies, your lines have indeed fallen in pleasant places. Strength must surely come from these hills."

"Well," said Mrs. Thomas, not vaingloriously, but as if stating a fact, "we certin'y done our best by this place. Nobody can say we ain't tried to give it a air

CHAPTER EIGHT

of refinement. We four, Mis' Evans, Mis' Nitschkan, Mis' Landvetter and myself has always hung together since we come here, an' if folks ain't done what was right, we've usually had the strength to make 'em, one way or another, an' took no back talk, either."

Carrothers looked slightly puzzled. "There are some rare spiritual natures here," he continued. "Now, that little Miss Swanstrom shows a touching desire to help in the Sunday school work."

He was interrupted by a loud burst of coughing from Mrs. Nitschkan, and an audible, if rather smothered remonstrance from Mrs. Thomas: "For goodness' sake, Mis' Landvetter, will you stop nudgin' me in the ribs, you most knocked me off the cliff."

"Have you broke ground for your cabin yet, Mr. Carrothers?" asked Mrs. Evans hastily, mindful of the social amenities.

"I began last week," he answered with pleased interest. "I wish you ladies would help me some with the plans."

"Almighty glad to," responded Mrs. Evans, in her most gracious society tones. "Now, preacher," solicitously, "this is something of a climb for a tenderfoot and we'd best rest a bit."

As they paused for a moment in the blue shadow of the pines, idly scanning the mountain road beneath the ledge of rock on which they stood, each gaze was caught and held by two figures strolling up the sunny expanse of the highway—a straight, sturdy young miner, with a dark, handsome face, and a girl whose white dress was

THE NEW MISSIONER

carefully lifted from the dust, and whose rose-wreathed hat was hanging half-way down her back from the pink ribbons knotted under her chin. Her attitude expressed unmistakably a coquettish and petulant aloofness and an exaggerated indifference to the evidently impassioned and expostulatory nature of the man's remarks.

"Ah, that is Miss Swanstrom now!" exclaimed Carrothers, in tones of interest, "and who is the young man with her?"

"Frank McGuire," said Mrs. Evans briefly. "It's Jack to-day, Don to-morrow, and Tom the day after."

Even as she spoke, Myrtle glanced upward and smiled and nodded. The smile deepened as she saw Carrothers's bodyguard, and acting on a sudden mischievous impulse, she snatched a flower from her belt, and hurled it toward them. It fell a few feet short of them, half-way up the cliff, and Carrothers, his face alight, scrambled down over the rocks, rescued the blossom and fastened it in his coat, waving his hat, as Myrtle stood flushed and laughing beneath. Perhaps for both, an added spice to the situation was the unconcealed and angry remonstrance of McGuire.

"Gosh A'mighty," murmured Mrs. Nitschkan at this unseemly and audacious sight. "Ain't she a bold one!"

"You bet if she vas mine, she'd get a touch of de stick," chuckled Mrs. Landvetter. But Mrs. Evans maintained a silence more ominous than speech.

And if the preacher was noticeably absent-minded during the rest of the stroll, it were not improbable to conjecture that his thoughts were more fully occupied

CHAPTER EIGHT

with the evanescent bloom on Myrtle's cheek, and the fleeting radiance of her youthful eyes, than by the conversation of the ladies in whose company he walked.

But Myrtle had, so to speak, fired the first gun with such heedless daring, such flaunting and reckless disregard of consequences, that Mrs. Evans's companions felt themselves justified in expecting an immediate return fire and were rather aggrieved when none was forthcoming.

Mrs. Thomas, in dilating upon the matter afterwards said: "I 'most expected to see a bolt fall from the blue and hit that girl dead, tryin' to carry on with preacher when Mis' Evans was takin' him home to dinner, and on Sunday, too! You bet Mis' Evans 'll pay her back."

But if Mrs. Evans had any such intentions, she kept them, for the moment, to herself. And the Zenith mind continued to focus itself on Carrothers, and to dwell with keen and undiminished interest upon the romantic possibilities which might eventuate from the presence of a preacher and a widower in the camp.

Naturally, Mr. Herries did not fail to comment upon the fact when he dropped in for an evening call upon the Missioner. "I feel sorry for Carrothers," he grumbled. "He's a weak sister; but every time he climbs out of that cellar he's blasting for his health, there's five or six women setting around on the ground, ready to feed him pie and cake and tell him about their souls. If he expects to find any peace in these hills he'd better move up above timber line.

THE NEW MISSIONER

"Mrs. Evans has wasted no time in getting Susie Hazen over here from Red Fox," with one of his sardonic grins. "Well, of course, it narrows down to a race between Susie and Myrtle, or to put things as they really are, it's a race between Myrtle and Mrs. Evans.

"Now, far back as I can recollect," he scratched his chin and looked meditatively at the ceiling, "Mrs. Evans has never lost out more than two or three times; but there's plenty of fighting blood in the Swanstroms, and in my opinion, the odds are even."

"Mr. Herries, you're gossipping," Frances reproached him. "How can a man like you take an interest in such small affairs?"

"Why not?" he asked hardily. "If I sat here and read you a book, you'd say nothing; and why should you complain when I read you pages from the greatest book that ever was written—the book of human life—'tis comedy and tragedy, and," shaking his head, "God knows it's a sorry tale, a black, sorry tale. But," with a return of interest, "have you been keeping your eye on the Widow Thomas? Well, you'd better. There's some mischief brewing there, and——"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door, and almost before Frances could rise from her chair, Ethel entered, followed by Carrothers.

Ethel's face was paler even than usual, her eyes had a strained, excited expression, one long strand of her fair hair had escaped from the prim, confining security of her bonnet and waved across her cheek.

"Oh, Miss Benson," she cried, scarcely waiting for

CHAPTER EIGHT

Frances to greet them, "you won't never believe it! but me an' preacher has just been fired from the Garvins'. Ain't it so, Preacher?"

Carrothers bowed with injured dignity, his rather weak mouth trembling.

"Yes, sir," went on Ethel volubly in response to Frances's look of startled inquiry and Herries's rapid questions. "Walt just turned us out. Oh, he tried to do it polite, an' with a lot of 'pologies; but he said Lutie was too weak to stand any of our racket; racket! That's just the word he said. Wasn't it, Preacher?"

"Ethel, sit down here," said Frances, almost forcing her into a chair. "Now, tell me what this is all about. What were you doing?"

"Doing!" cried the girl passionately, "I was about my Master's business; that's what. Singin' hymns, prayin' an' exhortin', that's what he called a 'racket.' Tryin' to save Lutie's soul from hell. It's what I'm thinkin' of day and night. It's got to be done. Oh, Missioner," wildly, "she can't be let die in her sins, you know she can't. I don't mind bein' persecuted for righteousness' sake. They can beat me with all the stripes they're a mind to, I'm only a broken an' empty vessel; but I do think Walt might have respected Preacher's cloth."

"It's overalls now, since he took to digging that cabin," Herries put in slyly.

"Oh, I think of her night an' day, dyin' in her sins, an' with her affections set on vanities," wailed Ethel. "An' the Devil's gettin' in awful good work now. I took

THE NEW MISSIONER

Mr. Campbell to see her the other day, and there was an awful scene; an' to-night when me an' Preacher might have made some headway, we were turned out; but we can't give up, we can't give up! You're the one to fight the Devil now, Missioner, for she's got to be saved."

"Ethel, be quiet." Frances spoke almost sternly. "I am sure Mr. Garvin did not mean to be rude to you. He just feels that Lutie is so weak that she cannot bear this excitement; and that all her interest in clothes and jewels is just part of her disease."

"That's what Satan and the doctors say," cried Ethel.

"We are told," said Carrothers hesitatingly, "that there are some vessels born to dishonour, perhaps——" He paused under the steady regard of Frances's eye and did not finish the sentence.

Frances glanced quickly at Herries and experienced the same swift mental recoil she had felt once or twice before. He was leaning slightly forward in his chair, gazing eagerly from Ethel to Carrothers. His expression was almost wolfishly eager, and there was a keen, malicious sparkle in his eyes. It was as if he sought habitually in human nature for the weak, foolish, evil traits and was overjoyed when his search was rewarded.

With a surging, protective sense, Frances threw one arm about Ethel's bowed shoulders. The pale glance she threw at Herries was militant.

"The battle isn't ours, Ethel," she said gently. "That belongs to a greater power."

CHAPTER EIGHT

"But we're the instruments," wept Ethel.

"Perhaps not," murmured Frances, as much to herself as to the girl who sobbed on her shoulder.

"But you're the only one that can do anything now." Ethel clutched her with tense fingers. "It's up to you, Missioner, it's up to you."

"I have thought of it all," said Frances, her pale face grown paler, "but I haven't seen the way."

Herries picked up his hat and stamped across the room to the door. "Ethel's turned a page for you to read," he said in the Missionary's ear. "I've given you good advice before, haven't I? Well, take it now. Don't read that page."

CHAPTER NINE

IT is only in the great hives of men, where people press closely upon each other, where all day we jostle and push our fellows, and all night we hear the sound of their footfalls and laughter, that we ever achieve seclusion. In a village we afford a spectacle.

So Mrs. Thomas, who was passing through an inevitable, psychological crisis, fancied perhaps that her various emotions, doubts and perplexities were concealed in the depths of her soul, never dreaming that she was constantly under observation and being studied as microscopically as ever was beetle glued upon a card.

Mrs. Thomas, to put the fact succinctly, was floundering helplessly in the untried seas of a lately arrived freedom, struggling in some vague, instinctive effort to find herself; for to every life, even in the most unthinking and unawakened, there comes a moment when the individual makes an effort, perhaps abortive, to express himself, and the soul strives to burst into flower.

And it was this blind effort which, as her friends remarked, "had changed Marthy Thomas and made her act queer."

Married in early youth, she had long become accustomed to the dominance of a stronger nature. The first few days after her husband's death she had passed in a daze, her mind benumbed; but the sordidly spectacular

CHAPTER NINE

event of the funeral had roused her to a sense of the possibilities of the situation.

She felt the quick response of her sensuous temperament to the rows of Red Men marching unevenly along the dusty road to the discordant strains of the funeral march from Saul, and then slowly filing into the unpainted little church. She thrilled to the importance of her position, as she, too, entered, shrouded in sombre weeds and supported on either side by a sun-burned brother, in unaccustomed black, who had journeyed from a neighbouring camp for the occasion.

Afterward followed days when the consolatory offices of friends waxed and then waned, and she had declined from a tragedy to a commonplace, and the prosaic world asserted its claim. She was at once worried and dazzled, too, by the, to her, enormous responsibility of the insurance money.

This sum served as the conveniently shifting foundation of many a towering castle in Spain, for, as she gradually realised that the weight of Thomas's personality had really been lifted, her essentially romantic and emotional nature knew a period of bloom and efflorescence, all the more exotic because so long repressed.

And Nature, too, had thrown off the stern thrall of winter. Almost in a single night, the bare, bleak mountains rippled with the pink and blue of countless penstemon, and the silvery green of the sage bushes. The magpies and the bluejays fluttered through the pine trees, and the chipmunks whisked over the rocks,

THE NEW MISSIONER

and Mrs. Thomas's heart rose up and answered the summons of the spring.

Thomas had been a dour creature, with a highly cultivated gift of sarcasm, and an uncanny way of divining her hidden impulses and dragging them to the merciless light of ridicule, thus skilfully circumventing any possible expression of them; so day by day, as she became more accustomed to the absence of this cog upon her actions, her imagination fluttered its newly unbound wings and ventured in wider and wider circles.

The conversation with her companions and their amiable and authoritative dictation as to the best method of spending the insurance money, at first caused Mrs. Thomas much perturbation, but she finally followed the bent of her mind, and discarded Mrs. Nitschkan's rakish suggestions for the more alluring one of refurnishing the house.

Secure then, in the approbation of her friends, who were capable of displaying well exercised critical judgment and marked executive ability when dealing with the affairs of others, she joyously absorbed herself in cleaning and adorning her home; but when the pillow shams on the thick parlour bed were properly bordered and inserted with lace, the parlour set was glaring with red plush, and the kitchen fresh with whitewash and sticky with varnish, when any lingering sense of obligation to Thomas was fully liquidated by the planting of a headstone at one end of the grave, and a rose bush at the other, then, with a half-guilty sense of finality, she resolutely closed the portals of the past, and fingered

CHAPTER NINE

with fascinated interest and curiosity the key which was to open the door of the future.

At first, her long-hobbled mind merely wandered within the circumscribed radius of the present; but when, at last, it dawned upon her that she was free to follow the dictates of her whim, then a sense of ennui and discouragement at the narrow limits of her environment overcame her. There was no more setting of the house in order to be done. Her children were beyond the care of babyhood, and had not yet arrived at the age when maternal ambition would brood over them.

While in this frame of mind she read in the *Mount Tabor Review*, a weekly paper which disseminated the news of the entire county, the fact that Professor Alexis Hartshorn, the distinguished astrologer, palmist, crystal gazer and psychic reader, was located at Mount Tabor for a few weeks, and could be consulted at his rooms at Lamont Street from 9 A. M. until 9 P. M. each day. His picture accompanied the advertisement—a dark, poetic face, with a touch of mephistophelian cynicism, eternally alluring to the feminine imagination.

Mrs. Thomas gazed long and admiringly at the smudgy halftone, read and reread the advertisement, and then cutting it out with the scissors, placed it thoughtfully between the leaves of the family Bible with as much of an expression of decision on her face as it was capable of assuming.

The next morning she hired from the village blacksmith shop, which also did duty as the village livery stable, the sole vehicle it had to rent, a rattling buck-

THE NEW MISSIONER

board with but one uncertain seat. This wagon was drawn by an old and jaded white horse, whose reluctant head she turned in the direction of Mount Tabor, and slapping the lines on his back, drove slowly off with a lambent excitement and fear in her wide, appealing eyes.

From that day, Mrs. Thomas was another woman, abstracted, absorbed, remote. Her friends commented on her withdrawal from the common interest; but failed to convince themselves with an adequate explanation of the alteration.

"It may be grief, or it may be comin' into property; but Thomas's takin' off has certainly changed her," remarked Mrs. Evans, as the group of intimates sat sewing one June afternoon in Mrs. Nitschkan's cabin.

"I guess she's grieved more as we give her credit for," remarked Mrs. Landvetter ruminatively. "Vell, you can't neffer tell."

"Gosh a'mighty!" exclaimed Mrs. Nitschkan, with robust contempt. "Grievin'! Well, if I'd a bin in her shoes, I'd be out kickin' up my heels in pastur' this minute. Thomas! My Lord! You know, girls, what a raspin' tongue he had, an' how his pockets was just lined with glue when it come to pullin' any money out of 'em."

"Vell, he vasn't t'rowin' his money away like Walt Garvin, anyvay," contended Mrs. Landvetter.

"Ain't it awful!" Mrs. Evans sighed. "Why, Mr. Carrothers was sayin' only last night that he'd took a pencil an' paper an' calculated on how many missionaries could be sent to the heathen on what Walt paid

CHAPTER NINE

for a new necklace for Lutie this last week. I forget how many he said, an awful lot. You see in those hot countries where missionaries mostly go, it don't cost much to live. They can't wear many clothes, an' they just stir up a mess of rice, or pick a cocoanut or a banana off a tree. It's awful, Preacher says, to think of all those souls lost for the sake of Lutie's vanity."

"Tink of all dat money she could save," gloated Mrs. Landvetter, an avid gleam in her eye. "It's awful."

"Speakin' of lightmindedness!" remarked Mrs. Nitschkan, "I was callin' on Mis' O'Brien yesterday, an' I says to her: 'Why, wasn't you at the last meetin' of the Ladies' Aid Society?' An' she answers cool as a cucumber, 'I got somepin' better to do than set around with a lot of hens.' 'You don't know your camp,' I says. 'Us hens, as you call us, is better fellows than them that's settin' round on your porch every night.' Well, she threw me one of her devilish looks, an' she says as prim as you please, 'Them's Shock's friends.' I burst right out laughin'. Why, she's even got the lunger preacher there, and——"

But Mrs. Nitschkan's revelations regarding the Black Pearl were suddenly interrupted by a shrill exclamation from Mrs. Evans, who had half-risen from her seat by the window, and holding aside the straight, white muslin curtain, was peering at what, judging from the expression of her face, must have been a strange and unwonted spectacle. "Girls," in a queer, strained voice, "is my eyes gone bad or my head? For Heaven's sake! Look at this!"

THE NEW MISSIONER

Along the mountain road, its head pointed to the distant peaks, ambled the dejected white horse; behind it rattled the wagon with its swaying wheels, and high upon the uncertain seat were perched Mrs. Thomas and a man—the unidealised and coarsened reality of Professor Alexis Hartshorn. Mrs. Thomas's beloved crepe veil floated behind her, and above her best black gown her pink and white face smiled with a tremulous and April-like joy. She appeared oblivious to the fact that behind the wagon trotted a tow-headed child of about six years, tears raining down its dirty little cheeks, while from its mouth burst a series of ear-piercing wails: "Ma—ma I—wa'—a-go—too-o-o." Further back in the road a ragged urchin, a year or two older, indifferent to his parent's pleasuring, scooped up handfuls of the deep yellow dust and threw it high in the air, to descend again upon his head in a sifting cloud.

As the pair on the wagon vanished in the same golden haze, the women who had crowded to the window with panting ejaculations of surprise and consternation turned away and sank weakly into their seats.

"Vell, my goodness gracious!" sighed Mrs. Landvetter, mechanically seizing the coffeepot, "who vas dat? One of dem brudders of hers? Hein?"

"Hm-m-m," sniffed Mrs. Evans significantly. "She was wearing her best veil and her Sunday dress—in this dust, too. Does that look like brother? Not much. Pass me the teapot, Nitschkan, I could keel right over."

"Vell, who you s'pose it vas?"

"How should I know?" replied Mrs. Evans tartly.

CHAPTER NINE

"I only know from the way she's got up an' the way she looks, that she ain't entertainin' no relations. An' this soon, too! I don't think it looks real nice."

"Ho, ho!" chorused Mrs. Nitschkan. "Marthy's got a beau. Well, she surely ain't lost no time."

"Und dose kids, too," sighed Mrs. Landvetter. "Vasn't dey dirty now?"

"They ain't no more neglected than the rose bush she planted at Thomas's grave," remarked Mrs. Evans. "Paid two fifty for it, stuck it in the earth, an' then never went back to give it a drop of water."

"I do' know if she ever did get the stones put in his grave. For all she knows the kiotes have scratched him up an' et him," said Mrs. Nitschkan, with gloomy relish.

"Like as not," answered Mrs. Evans abstractedly; but her brow had cleared. "I tell you what, girls, I think someone had ought to talk to Marthy Thomas."

"Someone seems to be tryin' to this afternoon," chuckled Mrs. Nitschkan. "An' to-night Dan Mayhew an' Willie Barker 'll be showin' up."

"Willie Barker's engaged," said Mrs. Evans contemptuously. "An' Dan Mayhew tends to her business. He wouldn't look at Marthy Thomas anyway, when he could have his pick of all the girls in the county. Still, it don't look right for her to be cavortin' 'round this soon, an' I think Missioner is the one to speak to her. Maybe this is one of them soul problems she preached about last Sunday."

"Say, wasn't she great!" exclaimed Mrs. Nitschkan enthusiastically, slapping her knee. "Her eyes were

THE NEW MISSIONER

rolled up, and her face kind of shone. I says to her comin' out, I says, 'Missioner, you minded me this mornin' of the serpent that was lifted up in the wilderness. I bet he didn't look no nicer than you.' ”

“Well, that ain't the question now,” Mrs. Evans spoke impatiently. “I guess I'll put on my hat an' go up an' see Missioner this evening—kind o' point out her duty about talkin' to Marthy.”

It was agreed by the other two ladies that she could have thought of no better plan.

Now Frances, either because she lived near to the highway, or because she was one of those personalities bound to be sought, had grown accustomed to receiving many visitors. Therefore, it was no especial surprise to her when Mrs. Evans dropped in for an evening call. She saw the small, active figure hurrying up the hillside in the late twilight.

“I jus' thought I'd come up and set with you a spell, Missioner. Sile, he's gone to see Walt Garvin. You know Walt's made him foreman over at the Mont d'Or. Ain't it grand! My! I wisht I could think of somethin' to do for that poor thing perishin' in her laces an' jewels. She's right fond of my cookin', an' I been able to help a little that way though.”

“Oh, poor Lutie!” cried Frances, with a break in her voice. Her face looked pale, there were black lines under her eyes. “You can't be with her, Mrs. Evans, as much as I've been and not learn to love her. She's so helpless and dependent, and she never complains. She tries so hard to get away from her suffering. That's

CHAPTER NINE

the hardest thing to bear; but she's just trying to distract her mind with the foolish things."

"'Course," agreed Mrs. Evans. "Well, you surely been awful good to her, Missioner; but who ain't you good to?" real gratitude in her voice. "I tell you, I'll never forget what you done for Sile an' me, if I live to be a thousand years. Sile feels awful kind to me for sacrificin' myself to give up the hack. An' I let him feel that way, you bet; though between you an' me, I was gettin' pretty tired of spendin' half my time drivin' up an' down in all kinds of weather. I s'pose you ain't heard that I took up something new?" with importance.

"Something new?" repeated the Missionary.

Mrs. Evans nodded.

"Yes, sir, I took the agency for Vitina. Vitina's the best all round medicine for man and beast that ever was put up. You know what a way we got to live here. The nearest doctor ten miles over the pass, an' us either dead or got well before he gets here. I was surprised at Sile, when I told him I'd took the agency. He says: 'Well, I don't like it, Effie, but since you got to be in business, I guess this is quieter than drivin' the hack. That was such a darned show-off game; kind of advertised to everybody that I couldn't keep you.'"

"'Oh, this ain't no money-makin' concern,' I says, 'it's jus' sort of saunterin' in some of the back doors of a few particular friends an' handin' out somethin' that's goin' to ease their lives.' You see," concluded Mrs. Evans, with the sigh of the capable in dealing with the incapable world, "husbands have got to be man-

THE NEW MISSIONER

aged. They ain't got no real sense. I'm makin' quite a little on the side. I calculate to get enough to get Celora's teeth fixed and buy me that piece of black silk over in Hayman's window. Who's that?" she asked suddenly, as two figures passed through the deepening twilight and on down the hill. "I do believe it's the lunger preacher and Myrtle Swanstrom. Missioner, I think Myrtle had ought to be remonstrated with. Everybody in camp's talkin' about the way she's treatin' Frank McGuire. Yes, she had ought to be remonstrated with, and you're the one to do it."

"I'll wait until I know more about the subject," said Frances coolly. She was not one to submit lightly to dictation.

"An' Marthy Thomas!" continued Mrs. Evans. "She's been actin' queer lately; us girls suspicioned it was a case of man, but we couldn't find out who, an' this afternoon we all saw her drivin' around with some stranger,—yes," nodding her head, "an' we sort of thought if you'd go to see her an' find out who it was, it might help some."

"Why, Mrs. Evans, I shall not do anything of the kind," returned Frances firmly. "What right have I to interfere in Mrs. Thomas's affairs?"

Mrs. Evans rose with a short laugh. "You'll be asked to 'fore long. You see! Marthy'll get herself into some kind of a scrape, an' then sit an' cry till the rest of us turns in and pulls her out of it. It's happened before now, an' it'll happen again. Just wait."

CHAPTER TEN

EVEN so authoritative and cocksure a lady as Mrs. Evans had no idea how prophetic were her parting words to Frances, nor how soon the prophecy they contained was to be fulfilled; but as she climbed the hill to the Missionary's cabin two or three mornings later, there was an air of I-told-you-so importance about her, which, perhaps, was only natural under the circumstances.

Frances sat in her doorway in the dancing light and shade of the quivering aspens which grew thickly about the cabin. Several chipmunks, a magpie, and a blue-jay or so, fed amicably from a bowl of cooked oatmeal without the door; but Frances Benson's gaze was not on them, nor on the open Bible on her knee. It was fixed on the ethereal blue deeps above the tree tops. Her lips moved slightly, and in her eyes were the exalted dreams, the unseeing rapture of the mystic who has bridged time and space, joy and sorrow, with prayer.

As Mrs. Evans approached, the Missionary's gaze dropped from the skies and looked through and beyond that feminine epitome of practicality.

"It's all love and beauty, Mrs. Evans, the whole universe." Her finger traced the lines in the Bible and her voice thrilled. "'If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how shall we love God, whom we have not seen?'"

THE NEW MISSIONER

Mrs. Evans looked at her with protecting pride and admiration. "That's all right, Miss Benson; but we got to get away from God to man this morning. Marthy Thomas has got a soul problem, and 'course she don't know what to do with it no more 'n a kitten. She sent Vi'let an' Clemency over with a note a while back, and I just loped on to find you."

She held out a crumpled bit of paper whereon was scrawled in painful characters:

Mis Evans, won't you get Missioner and come here. I'm in a muss and suffortin for it.

M. THOMAS.

Frances smoothed it out and read it. "Poor Mrs. Thomas," she exclaimed, her eyes becoming practical the moment there was work for her hands to do. She picked up her hat, and leaving the door open for the jays and the chipmunks to enter at will, she and Mrs. Evans set out for the newly painted Thomas residence. There, in the cool, white kitchen, Mrs. Landvetter and Mrs. Nitschkan were busying themselves preparing tea and coffee, while Mrs. Thomas sat beside a table, limp and dejected. There was a droop to her mouth like a child's, and her eyes slowly filled and brimmed over with tears which she occasionally wiped away with a wet handkerchief rolled into a tight ball.

"Well, here we are," said Mrs. Evans with loud cheerfulness, as she and Miss Benson entered. "Now, one of you girls pour us out a cup apiece, an' Mis'

CHAPTER TEN

Thomas, you jus' begin at the beginning and tell Missioner all about it. She'll get you out of any scrape you're in, won't you, Missioner?"

"I'll try," said Frances, with sincere kindliness.

Mrs. Thomas gulped convulsively once or twice and rolled and unrolled her handkerchief. "It's about the Perfessor," she wailed. "At first, he was awful nice. He come to see me often an' he certainly talked lovely. He quoted poetry and everything, like Thomas never did even before we was married; an' then he got to askin' me how I was fixed an' I told him. He said he had to know before he could foretell the futur' for me, an' then he was nicer than ever. He come right out an' said he loved me so that he couldn't sleep at nights for thinkin' of me."

Upon the faces of her listening friends dawned that faintly sarcastic expression which women assume on learning that a man is actually blinded by the fascinations of one of their sex. Having no illusions concerning each other, they cannot but regard with contempt this pitiable evidence of masculine dementia.

The practical, shrewd kindliness had gradually faded from Frances's eyes, leaving them puzzled and a little impatient. There occurred to her no remedy in the whole pharmacopœia of a soul doctor which can minister to a woman's infatuation.

And as she listened to Mrs. Thomas's tale, the spirit of warm helpfulness with which she had sought one in trouble, congealed to something perfunctory and professional, while her impatience was becoming vital. As

THE NEW MISSIONER

for Mrs. Thomas, she was about to acquire the bitter knowledge that while in sickness or in sorrow, women turn instinctively to one another, feeling intuitively that they will thus find the truest comfort, the completest understanding of their needs; in love, they must fly to the wilderness, for they stand alone, aloof, alien to feminine sympathy.

"He said," continued Mrs. Thomas, with tearful pride, "that he couldn't even eat 'less he was with me; but I'll tell you what, he certainly did make up for it then. They hasn't been an evening that he's et with me that I haven't been cookin' all day an' not enough left to feed the chickens."

"Hm-m-m, I bet you got to keep cookin' between him an' Willie Barker an' Dan Mayhew. It seems to me they keep the path to your gate warm," cried Mrs. Nitschkan rollickingly.

A faint, pink flush crept up Mrs. Thomas's face. "Willie Barker says he's got too much respect for me to try an' be steady company until my term of mourning is up; but he says he don't think it's right to the living to mourn for the dead; an' as for Dan Mayhew, he comes to talk business."

"How much does he know of this here Hartshorn?" asked Mrs. Evans pointedly.

"He don't know nothin'," returned Mrs. Thomas reluctantly.

The women cast meaning glances at one another over their cups.

"Vell, vy don' you go to him an' get him to shoo dis

CHAPTER TEN

feller off, if you wants to get rid of him?" asked Mrs. Landvetter, with Teuton common sense.

"I do' know if I do want to get rid of him," murmured Mrs. Thomas forlornly. "He can be awful nice; an' our courtship was just like a book until I hesitated about the money. Then he come every day and said it made him feel real impatient to see me actin' like I didn't trust him. It's the insurance money, you know. He says he wouldn't lay a finger on a penny of it; but he's got to save me from a awful fate he sees hangin' over me. He says he sees it in the stars an' in the crystal, an' that it's wrote on the cards too plain not to believe. It's something sudden, like bein' struck by lightning, if I don't get that money out of my hands before the third of June. He says the only way he sees to save me, is to give him the money an' not ask any questions about it for six months.

"He's awful cross with me because I do' know what to do, an' he comes over every day 'most, an' sets there in that chair you're in, Mis' Evans, an' glares at me with them gimlet eyes, until I'm so scared I 'most die. An'"—at this point Mrs. Thomas's sobs were unrestrained—"he says that this must be kept so awful secret, for if ever he hears of me tellin' a livin' soul, he'll work some kind of a conjurin' game on me, an' also publish the letters I wrote him in the Mount Tabor *Review*."

"Well, what the devil do you care?" asked Mrs. Nitschkan.

Mrs. Thomas flamed like a peony and caught her

THE NEW MISSIONER

breath once or twice before she answered. "They're so awful soft," she said at last.

Frances gave a quick exclamation of impatience. "Oh, Mrs. Thomas! How could you do anything so foolish? How did you happen to meet this man in the first place?"

"There wasn't nothing doin' here," Mrs. Thomas said simply. "Willie Barker an' Dan Mayhew wasn't droppin' in then. Oh," she wailed, with something like despair in her voice, "I thought I was goin' to like bein' a widow; but it's terrible lonesome. When I first got free, I thought I was goin' to have the time of my life; but it ain't so much fun as I thought it was goin' to be not to have Thomas jawin' me all day long."

"Vell, you can't neffer tell," remarked Mrs. Landvetter, in surprised consternation, her lace needles poised in air.

It was noticeable during the interview with this woman she had come to succour, that Frances's eyes had grown constantly harder, and now, something like contempt shadowed them. Her will, her executive ability, her skill, born of intuition and long practice in disentangling "soul problems," were powerless when opposed to the soft, immovable, wavering force which she now encountered. To the woman floundering in the bog of mistakes, mud-stained, worn with the struggle, she stretched forth her loving hands; but for one so elemental, so naïvely expressing her natural impulses as Mrs. Thomas, she had neither sympathy nor comprehension.

CHAPTER TEN

The narrowness of which Mr. Herries had once accused her, the inherent narrowness of the feminine nature, its unswerving devotion to the traditional dogmas of womanliness, now expressed itself in every line of her face and figure.

"I don't think a woman has any call to talk as you are doing," she said with grave reproof.

Mrs. Thomas exhibited the obstinacy of the meek. "I'd like to know why not?" she cried defiantly. "I'd like to know what right you got to judge me, Miss Benson. You don't know the lonesomeness of bein' a widow."

"Do you mean to say that you are contemplating a second marriage, not two months after your husband's death?" asked Frances, aghast.

But Mrs. Thomas had endured to the limit. "I don't care," in childish wrath. "You'd be a contemplatin' a second, or a third, or any old kind if you knew the lonesomeness of bein' a widow. An' I bet if you was to tell the truth," shrilly and amid streaming tears, "you'd want somebody to love you just the same as I do."

The scarlet crept up Frances's neck; but compressing her lips, she merely looked icily and remotely over the head of this possessor of a "soul problem," beyond her ken.

"Mrs. Thomas," she said curtly, "your behaviour and your sentiments make me ashamed of my sex."

"I don't care," reiterated Mrs. Thomas. "I don't care. It's your sex an' my sex that's talkin'. There ain't

THE NEW MISSIONER

no woman livin' that don't want a man to love her." She put her head on the table and sobbed afresh.

The women exchanged scornful and shocked glances over her head. "I guess we'd best leave you to yourself, Marthy Thomas," said Mrs. Evans, rising. "If you're in such a frame of mind that you've got to sass the Missioner, you'll be throwin' things at the rest of us. An' Thomas hardly cold in his grave yet! My!" as she closed the door behind the little party of visitors. "Ain't she the limit? Lord save me from them that don't know their own minds."

"But she's certain'y in the devil of a scrape," argued Mrs. Nitschkan good-naturedly. "Say the word, girls," rolling up her sleeves and feeling tentatively her swelling muscles, "an' I'll go over to Mount Tabor an' do up the Perfessor."

"That would never do, Nitschkan," Mrs. Evans hastily replied. "What we got to do is to work on this end of the line."

Frances, who had walked silently down the little path leading to the paling gate, now spoke. "I agree with Mrs. Evans," she spoke slowly. "I do not think it is worth while trying to do anything more with Mrs. Thomas. She is completely under that man's influence. As for him," she added grimly, "a good, strong man should deal with him."

"That is so," responded Mrs. Evans emphatically, "but I don't know one that's got any call to mix in, unless it's Dan Mayhew. He's her trustee, an' he might do something with her."

CHAPTER TEN

"Dan's an awful sensible man," said Mrs. Landvetter gloomily. "You go an' tell him de way she carry on, and he won't be trustee no more. Den how she goin' to get along?"

"Goodness only knows," answered Mrs. Evans desperately. "Still, we can't stop to think about that. What we got to do is to try as hard as we can to get her out of this muss. Ain't that so, Miss Benson?"

"I think so," replied Frances in a depressed tone.

"She showed me a letter from him last night, women dear," chuckled the irrepressible Nitschkan, "in which he said that she wasn't to hesitate no longer, as the danger was at hand, an' he called her his blue-eyed beauty. A big ox like her with a front tooth gone!"

"My Lord!" sighed Mrs. Evans. "Who'd have any patience? Well, girls, I heard Sile say that Dan was workin' on his prospect, so it's no use stoppin' at his law office. Up we'll have to go."

It was something of a climb, up through a trail bordered with the pink and blue penstemon all abloom in the sparkling, balsamic June air; but these were hardy mountain women, and it was not long before they reached the prospect where Dan Mayhew was hard at work with pick and shovel in a hole about twenty feet deep.

"Hello, Dan," called the breezy voice of Mrs. Nitschkan, as the women peered over the rim of his embryo mine.

"Hello, girls," he answered heartily, throwing down his tools and pushing his hat further back on his head,

THE NEW MISSIONER

the better to see his visitors. "Come to call on me? What's in the wind now? Want a divorce apiece? Wait till I climb up since I ain't got electric elevators running yet. I can entertain you better up there. What do you think o' them for samples?" He threw some bits of quartz into Mrs. Landvetter's lap. "Looks like 'The Marthy' was goin' to have a futur', don't it?"

He was a big broad-shouldered fellow, as he stood among his callers, who sat about the yawning hole on convenient boulders. One of the strong men of this earth—a fitting type to stand erect in the stern and savage mountains, and to wrest from them the secret of their hidden treasures.

"Fine," said Mrs. Landvetter, leisurely examining the specimens. "Great! Dere's a streak of peacock."

"Le's see." Mrs. Evans scanned the bits of rock professionally. "Good, Dan, if the streak don't pinch. I'm kind o' 'fraid you struck a pocket, though."

"Oh, we all know Mrs. Evans knows more about mining than Sile," commented Mayhew good-naturedly. "Now *he* thinks 'The Marthy' 's goin' to be a great mine. Sorry I have no seats but boulders to offer you ladies. When 'The Marthy' pans out you shall all have plush rockers."

The constant iteration of the name "Marthy" seemed to react upon feminine nerves. Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Landvetter and the Missionary glanced uneasily at one another. It remained for Mrs. Nitschkan, with her lack of nerves, to solve the problem, for, at Mayhew's words, she threw her head back with a great burst of laughter,



"Hello, girls," he answered heartily



CHAPTER TEN

showing every squirrel-white tooth in her head. "The Marthy! The Marthy!" she cried. "Why, Dan, it's the Marthy we've come to see you about."

Mayhew's expression changed. "What's the matter with Mrs. Thomas?" he asked quickly, looking from one to the other.

"Oh, dere ain't nottin' de matter wid her, dat is——" said Mrs. Landvetter, and then paused in embarrassed silence, attempting to extricate her lace work from her pocket.

"Well, what it is then?" asked Mayhew impatiently. "You girls got something on your minds, or you wouldn't be up here."

"That is true, Mr. Mayhew. We have something on our minds, and we thought it best to come directly to you," said the Missionary, decisively. "We are all very much worried about Mrs. Thomas."

"What's the matter with her?" anxiously. "Is she sick?"

"No, she is quite well; but——" Miss Benson tried to speak kindly. "She has gotten into quite a serious entanglement with this fortune teller over in Mount Tabor, Professor Hartshorn."

"What do you mean by your 'serious entanglement'?" growled Mayhew. "Speak plain, Missioner."

"I mean," replied the Missionary, with a tightening of the lips and a heightened colour, "that she is completely under the influence of this man, and that he is using that influence to extort money from her. She has promised to give him, day after to-morrow, all that

THE NEW MISSIONER

remains of the two thousand dollars her husband left her."

Mayhew's eyes glared from under his brows, but he looked from one woman to another in a dazed fashion.

"It's straight, Dan," corroborated Mrs. Evans. "He's just hypnotised her, an' now she's in this box."

"Well, why wasn't I told before?" asked Mayhew. "What did you let her get into it for? How did she ever meet him?"

"She went to get her fortune told," began Mrs. Evans.

"She's so lonesome, bein' a widow, an' she wanted somebody to love her," mimicked Mrs. Nitschkan in a small voice, imitating closely Mrs. Thomas' lisp and coy manner.

The three mountain women rocked back and forth on their boulders with bursts of laughter.

"Aw, for the Lord's sake!" exclaimed Mayhew disgustedly. "I wisht women had some sense. Missioner, can you tell me what this is all about?"

"It's just as these ladies say," remarked Frances coldly. She had small sympathy for the culprit and was actuated in her present course solely by a sense of duty. "Mrs. Thomas explained to us that she was lonesome after her husband's death, and with a desire for excitement went to see this Professor Hartshorn. He at once made love to her, and now informs her that he sees in his crystals, and his stars, and cards, some terrible calamity impending unless she gives him her

CHAPTER TEN

money. He has so succeeded in frightening her that I do not think she will dare to refuse his demand."

"He'll get his head broke before night," threatened Mayhew. "My Lord!" mopping his brow with a blue and white cotton handkerchief and looking desperately at the row of women before him. "What was you women a-thinkin' of, sittin' around doin' nothin' and lettin' her get into such a scrape?"

"My patience!" cried Mrs. Evans, while her sisters gasped and gazed at one another. She sprang to her feet and drew up her tiny figure to the fullest. "You must think we ain't got nothin' to do, Dan Mayhew, but look after that overgrown baby. Maybe you think we ain't got husbands and children an' houses to mind. Oh, yes; we ought to let them go to look after Marthy Thomas, that ain't got sense enough to tend to her own business."

"Is that true?" said Mayhew, surveying her angrily and speaking with icy sarcasm. "Well, I guess there's a good many men in the camp, includin' poor Sile Evans, that wishes there was more like her. You all think you're too smart to mind your own business and got to stick your fingers in everybody else's pie. I guess if the truth was known you drove her to this. It speaks a lot for her friends, don't it, that she got so lonesome that she had to run to some fakir for consolation?"

"Vy vasn't you around to do some of the consolins', Dan?" asked Mrs. Landvetter hardily.

"She was wantin' to be loved," roared Mrs. Nitsch-

THE NEW MISSIONER

kan. A suppressed giggle ran through the feminine part of the group with the exception of the Missionary.

"Well, it's a pity some of the rest of you didn't," he exclaimed doggedly. "Oh, you're Miss Know-it-alls. If she'd 'a' been treated right by you women," he continued accusingly, "she wouldn't 'a' gone traipsin' around to fakirs. You didn't show her no human sympathy. You're a cold-blooded lot. Oh, I know the whole of you, 'ceptin' Missioner. I could read your pedigrees from the beginning. It couldn't be expected that you'd understand her. She ain't made of the same kind of clay that you are. She's trustin', that's what she is, trustin' and confidin'; but what's the use of trustin' in flint an' confidin' in ice?"

"My Gawd, Dan Mayhew! Air you a-jumpin' on us 'cause Marthy Thomas is a d. f.?" asked Mrs. Evans shrilly.

He wheeled on her savagely. "You ought to be scrunched 'twixt a man's thumb an' finger like you was a flea, which you are," contemptuously. "I've asked you and you ain't give me any good answer—what did you ever let her get in such a muss for? Oh, yes," interrupting the clamour of voices; "you could 'a' helped if you'd wanted to. I know how much she thinks of all of you; but you couldn't lift a finger to help her, could you? That would be puttin' yourselves out some, wouldn't it? You couldn't do nothing but sit around and knock her behind her back."

"You are not just to us, Mr. Mayhew." Frances attempted to speak with dignity, but her lip trembled.

CHAPTER TEN

He made a scornful gesture, as if renouncing them all; but it was plain from his absorbed gaze bent on the ground, his knotted brow, that he was oblivious to their presence.

Mrs. Evans fidgetted uneasily. "Dan," she said at last, "get over your mad and tell us what had best be done."

"I know what I'm a-going to do," he cried, with resolution, picking up his hat and coat from the ground. "I'm goin' to Mount Tabor to drive that skunk out of the mountains. Then I'm a-comin' back and ask the best, the most trustin' and confidin' woman in the world to marry me. Good-morning, ladies." He walked lightly and rapidly down the trail before them.

The faces of the women left behind him were pale and stunned.

With a quick gesture of self-reproach the Missionary laid one hand against her cheek, as with the strange, sad eyes of the mystic she gazed above the swaying pine tops into the depths of the blue, blue sky.

"Oh, I haven't met it right. This was Mrs. Thomas's soul problem, and I didn't help her solve it. I just got mad and quit."

"Such is life," murmured Mrs. Landvetter, with some vague attempt at consolation. "You can't neffer tell."

"Take it back, Landvetter," returned Mrs. Nitschkan practically, brushing a bit of adhering clay from her short skirt. "Take it back. Life ain't nothin' so cantankerous. You mean, 'such is men.'"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FRANCES sat in her cabin door that evening. The air was unusually mild and the moonlight lay on the hills; beyond great wastes of shadow the peaks shone with a white unearthly glory. The spring, the delicate, evanescent spring of the mountains, had vanished, and Frances, whose imagination had been quickened by living in the vast solitudes, had pictured an airy maiden who stood for a moment on the shining summits and then sped downward, flowers springing where her light feet brushed the hillsides, down, down to the valleys of mist.

It was summer now, the summer of golden days of an ineffable freshness, of long clear evenings, when the primroses opened their white-petalled cups and filled the air with their enchanting and exotic fragrance; but even the healing balm of the earth's beauty could not restore the Missionary's soul. Since morning she had sat in that abasement of spirit, that profound depression she always experienced when she had, as she phrased it, "denied her Lord" and "failed to live up to the light."

"Here I sat dreaming of the universal love," she reproached herself in bitter scorn, "and when I was called on to prove it to Mrs. Thomas, I had nothing to give her, because I dared to judge her and her way of

CHAPTER ELEVEN

loving. It makes me sick, it makes me sick! Oh," with a wave of impatient anguish, "do I always have to judge and manage? Won't I ever reach the 'neither do I condemn thee'?" Her tightly clasped hands, which she had raised to her heart with an habitual gesture, fell limply in her lap, and her head sank. She felt sore and spent, as if she had essayed to climb a high mountain and had slipped and fallen, bruised upon the rocks.

There she sat, until, hearing footsteps upon the little bridge, she lifted her head to see the tall figure of Garvin advancing through the moonlight. He came slowly, with down-bent head and, it seemed to Frances, with dragging steps, as if he lifted his feet with an effort.

"Don't get up, Miss Benson," he said, as she arose and stood in the doorway. "Don't get up; I'll just sit down on the step here, if you will let me. Please don't bother about a chair. I'd rather sit down here," suiting the action to the words. He rested his bare head against the lintel of the door, and she fancied she heard him sigh. Some instinct bade her hold her peace, and for a time they sat in silence; then he drew one hand across his brow.

"Miss Benson," he said slowly, "I don't know how I can ever thank you for your kindness to Lutie. You must never think that I underrate it. I know how busy your life is, and I know how many demands you have on your time and patience; and when I consider this, and think of all the hours you manage to give to Lutie, and

THE NEW MISSIONER

that you have been not only friend and companion, but nurse as well, why—I haven't words to thank you."

"It is not necessary to thank me," she replied. "It has made me happy to do what little I can for her. Lutie is very lovable, Mr. Garvin."

"Yes, poor little thing!" he sighed. "But, Miss Benson, because you have already done so much, I have hated to come to you in this new perplexity, and yet"—sighing again—"what can I do? I have nowhere else to turn. You see, the doctors all agree that she has only a little while to live. Well, if they are right, and these are really her last days, why, I want them happy. If her fancy turns to jewels and clothes and that sort of thing, by God, she shall have them!" He brought his big brown hand with the long lean fingers down on his knee. "I want her last days happy at any cost. Ethel means well, and she's been a good friend to Lutie; but she's crazy about religion, and she's got some kind of a fixed idea that she's got to save Lutie's soul at any cost. I don't see"—with a short vexed laugh—"why she don't get enough excitement out of beating her tambourine and singing and praying in the streets without tormenting my poor girl."

"Every time Ethel talks to her about religion it brings on a nervous attack. Fortunately, she's taken rather a fancy to the lunger preacher—what's his name? Carrothers—and he hasn't bothered her much about her soul; he knows better, I guess. But then it's

CHAPTER ELEVEN

anything that's new with her now. She's so tired—the restlessness of disease, you know.” He brooded moodily. “You will help me, won't you, Missioner?” falling for the first time into the familiar village term. “You are all I have to depend on. The new difficulty I spoke of? Oh!—it is this. The doctors insist that she must have nurses to care for her, and, indeed, she is so ill that it is absolutely necessary; and yet I can do nothing with her, she rebels so at the thought. It makes her feel that she is really ill, you see. Now, if you could help me persuade her it is necessary? I can't be with her all of the time. You see, there is a great deal of business which must have more or less attention, and then”—with a faint smile—“I've got to sleep a little.”

Frances looked at him. This man, worn with vigils and spent with the endeavour to soothe the last days of a poor wreck of a woman, was that same Garvin of whom Ethel and Herries had spoken as the willing companion, the complaisant prey, of light women. It was an incredible, a horrible thought, and she put it from her.

“I will do everything that I can, believe that,” she answered earnestly.

“Thank you. I was sure of it,” he said simply.

True to her word, she did try, the next morning, and succeeded so well that without undue excitement Lutie was not only persuaded to permit the presence of nurses, but even looked forward to their arrival as a new interest.

THE NEW MISSIONER

After having accomplished her mission, Frances returned through the village and stopped at two or three houses. Everywhere she heard discussed the one topic on which Zenith was, for the moment, concentrating its interest: Myrtle Swanstrom's mischievous skirmishes with the invincible Mrs. Evans, the match game which was being played between them with the hazard at stake—the lunger preacher.

All Zenith agreed that the game, as it stood, had been played by experts, and in a masterly manner, and that it was a contest well worth putting one's money on.

To show a few of the moves—Mrs. Evans it was who kindly offered to assist the preacher in planning the arrangement of his cabin, and, as they sat about the kitchen table in the evening studying his drawings, would appeal to the shy and silent Susie for advice: “Mr. Carrothers,” explanatorily, “she’s such a house-keeper as never was. When the cabin’s finished, we’ll come over, and Susie shall get up one of her suppers for you. My Lord! They’re simply great! Susie, lift the coffee off the stove and hand down Preacher a piece of pie.”

But it was Myrtle who would inadvertently and innocently meet him as he came whistling down the hill at sunset. Myrtle, who would at first refuse to turn back, protesting that she had “an errand further along,” and would then be reluctantly persuaded to postpone the errand and go for a stroll.

And if Carrothers was frequently invited to supper



-J. Walter Lloyd

It was Myrtle who would innocently meet him

CHAPTER ELEVEN

at the homes of those Myrtle called "the Evans click," with Susie invariably and ostentatiously seated beside him, a proceeding which caused the retiring girl a more obvious embarrassment on each occasion—why, the preacher, on the other hand, was more and more frequently to be seen sitting on the step of the Swanstrom cabin through the summer evenings; and Frank McGuire's frown daily grew deeper, his expression more sullen.

"I do' know, Mis' Evans," remarked Mrs. Thomas frankly at the Wednesday afternoon meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society; "I do' know if you're just on the right tack. 'Course," sighing deeply, "we got to recognise that bacon an' greens is more to a brute of a man than the gentle influence of woman; but you got to remember that he's young and ain't made such a god of vittles as they do when they're older. Now, Susie is always showed off to him bakin', or sewin', or scrubbin', while Myrtle comes saunterin' along his path in a white dress, the sun shinin' on her yellow hair an' a sprinklin' of musk on her handkercher'. If you notice, for the last three Sundays, he's been rantin' about the lilies of the field. Always watch the straws, I says, an' then bimeby you'll get to know somethin'."

"Myrtle had ought to be remonstrated with," said Mrs. Evans decisively, "an' I think Missioner here is the one to do it."

"Do you? Well, I'm not at all sure that I do," replied Frances. Nevertheless, she pondered consider-

THE NEW MISSIONER

ably if a word in season were not her duty and also as to the best methods of approaching Myrtle.

Opportunity, however, arranged the matter without her lifting a finger; for one afternoon, a few days later, as she sat sewing by her cabin door, occasionally lifting her eyes to watch the magpies flutter their black and white wings through the pines, or the chipmunks whisk silently up to snatch a bit of food from the pan that she always placed for them, Myrtle came panting up the trail, her pink face glowing in the depths of her pinker sunbonnet.

"Howdy, Missioner," she called blithely. "I ain't seen you for a long time."

"No, indeed, and I'm very glad to see you," returned Frances, reflecting that this might be a good chance to speak that word in season which was weighing upon her mind.

"You see," said Myrtle explanatorily, "we got company. Aunt Ella and Uncle Hiram from the East. Company's lots of trouble, Missioner. 'Fore they come, it was gettin' the house all cleaned, an' tidies an' throws an' pincushion covers done up; an' between times workin' on Paw to let Maw cut his hair, an' makin' him promise to wear a collar while they're here.

"Uncle Hiram, he's well off, an' Aunt Ella, she always was that airy an' set up, Maw says. So Maw can't bear for her to think that because we live up here in the mountains, we don't know what's what, an' don't have things right. Yes, company's lots of trouble."

For a moment Myrtle's gaze sought the sun-washed

CHAPTER ELEVEN

valley, and then her voice was lifted again, anxiously and withal hesitatingly.

"Say, Miss Benson, the worst is about Frank McGuire. You see," pleating the ruffle on her apron, a flush rising on her soft cheek, "Frank an' me was goin' to be married this summer, an' Paw was tickled to death, an' then Maw, she put her foot down because she wanted to show off to Aunt Ella and act like I could get Preacher. An' to please her, I told Frank I wanted to put off the wedding till fall. Well, he wouldn't believe it was just on account of Maw's pride before Aunt Ella. He suspicioned all the time that I was going to throw him over for the preacher, an' he took on something awful; and now," two large tears rolling down her cheeks, "we ain't hardly on speakin' terms, an' he says he won't be played with no longer, an' that I've got to tell folks at the raspberry social they're goin' to have before long that we're goin' to be married or he'll track out over the range and never come back."

"But, Myrtle," said Frances gently, "why wait until then? Why not decide now?"

"No," her blue eyes flashing through the drops which still clung to her lashes, "Frank's got to 'polo-gise first for the way he spoke. I ain't forgot some of the things he said; callin' me 'heartless flirt.' Well, I've showed him what flirtin' is."

"Ah, Myrtle," remonstrated Frances, "wouldn't it make you happier to forgive him? It is easy to forgive those we love."

THE NEW MISSIONER

"No, it ain't," said Myrtle sharply. "They're the ones it's the hardest to forgive." She shut her lips with a toss of her head.

"Say, Missioner," after an interval of silence and in a burst of what Frances regarded as reprehensible levity, "Preacher's awful nice, ain't he?"

"He is very pleasant," was the cold response.

"Frank's terrible jealous of him." Myrtle made the statement with undisguised pride.

The Missionary was genuinely shocked. "Myrtle! How can you accept Mr. Carrothers's attentions if you really care for Frank?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Myrtle indifferently. "Seems like there's a-plenty reasons for my carrying on with him—to please Maw, an' spite Mis' Evans an' her click, an' help out Susie Hazen. Don't you tell none of 'em, Miss Benson, but Susie's that mortified that she don't know what to do; an' she don't dare to speak up, 'cause Mis' Evans is that set. You know her. Why, all these tea-parties they're havin', an' settin' Susie beside Preacher, makes her so pizen shamed she don't know what to do. Susie's fellow is Tom Eagen, over to Black Snake, an' she's goin' to marry him in September; but she don't want Mis' Evans to know it, 'cause she'd stick her foot in it, sure. That click just think they can boss everything here in Zenith, but I'm a-goin' to show them that they can't boss me."

"But, Myrtle, is it worthy of you to encourage Mr. Carrothers and torment poor Frank just to spite someone?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Oh, it don't hurt the boys, really it don't," asserted Myrtle, anxious to retain the Missionary's good opinion. "Preacher, he don't care a snap about me. He's got the picture of a girl from Illinois in his watch an' he just wants to talk about her an' take on about how lonely he is; and as for Frank, it won't hurt him none. Why, Missioner, some of the boys have told me they'd drown themselves in the creek, or jump over the Pass, or go up above timber line and live like recluses; but they never did, not one of 'em. And you just see," rising to go home, "if I don't teach Frank McGuire what flirting is."

Frances looked anxiously after the girl as she started down the hill, then she ran down the road after the younger woman. "Myrtle," she said in a voice which trembled, "don't try to get even with Frank; remember his provocation. Sometimes whims like this spoil a woman's whole life. Make it up, Myrtle."

Myrtle put her hands affectionately on the Missionary's shoulders and laughed. "I'll teach him," she said emphatically. "Don't you worry none, Missioner; I got to teach him."

Frances turned away discouraged, and with a sigh retraced her steps.

That evening, while yet the daylight lingered, she was hastily summoned to Lutie's bedside. After she had entered the house she passed quickly to the red boudoir; there she was arrested by the sight of the crouching figure of Ethel, who sat with her head bent upon the

THE NEW MISSIONER

table, her slight form shaken by suppressed but hysterical sobs, while Carrothers stood beside her, his lips compressed, his face pale, and fright, it struck Frances, in his eyes.

"Oh, Missioner," gasped Ethel at the sight of her. "Oh, Missioner, it's the awfulest thing that ever happened. We've been drove out again, an' she's dyin'—she's dyin' in her sins." She dropped on her knees, her hands clutching the folds of Frances's skirt. She swayed back and forth, her face was distorted with weeping, and her fair hair falling wildly about it. "Missioner, it's up to you. It's up to you. We can't do nothing more. Walt's drove us out; but it's up to you to save her."

Frances drew her hand heavily across her eyes. She had known days of perplexity and nights of prayer on this subject, and Ethel's appeal was like a blow struck on quivering nerves. She drew one deep involuntary sigh, and looked above Ethel's head, beyond Carrothers to the scarlet, smiling, unctuous cardinals, the pink and blue maidens dancing on the startlingly green sward, upon the walls.

Without waiting for an answer, Ethel again broke into hysterical, incoherent appeals, which died into sobbing silence as Garvin appeared at the door.

His face was dead white, a dark, toneless pallor; there were new and deeper lines about his eyes, and his mouth, as he glanced quickly at Ethel and Carrothers, became set in a grim expression of satiric scorn.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Lutie is waiting for you, Miss Benson." And Frances, stooping a moment to smooth back Ethel's hair and gently unclasping her hands, turned to him with a sense of relief. Here, at last, was strength and self-control.

Lutie lay propped high upon her pillows. Her eyes were wide and wild, her face terror-stricken. Her gaze held Frances like the clutch of a drowning man; but she did not speak until the Missionary bent above her and took both the weak, fluttering hands in hers.

"Ethel says I'm a-going to die, Missioner," she muttered in her hoarse, almost inaudible voice, "and I got to know something, I got to know the truth. Walt here, he says anything to please me. He'd lie his head off for me; wouldn't you, Walt?" There was a touch of the old, pathetic pride she took in any evidences of his affection for her. "But you"—it was as if the words were expelled from her by the force of a passion which overrode the difficulties of speech—"you wouldn't lie to save my soul from hell; would you, Missioner?"

A weight as of thousands of tons fell upon Frances's heart. She looked across the bed at Garvin. He was gazing at her with such profound intensity, such concentrated appeal, that she caught his prayer as readily as if it had been expressed in words. It was: "Promise anything, anything that will spare this tortured child. Soothe her. Give her peace. In human pity, let your beliefs and standards go. These are her last conscious moments." But there was no acquiescence, no promise

THE NEW MISSIONER

in the Missionary's eyes; and it was with difficulty that he suppressed a groan.

And Frances suddenly felt an overwhelming pity for him; her strength, moral and physical, lapsed in a moment to weakness; she longed to assure him again of her co-operation and sympathy. His unspoken appeal stirred the depths of her nature; but the dying girl upon the bed was asking a greater thing than he. She was asking with all her seeking soul for the one thing that love would deny her, and her appeal struck deeper than his.

All the finer forces, the trained spiritual forces of Frances's nature rose to a decision. Lutie had asked for the truth, as Frances knew it; by her soul's light, the dying girl should have it; and having thus determined, she felt her weakness disappear and strength flow to her from infinite sources.

"You wouldn't lie to save my soul fr——" the hoarse plea failed.

"I wouldn't lie to save your soul from hell," came the steady answer.

Garvin's head dropped on his hands.

"Ethel and Preacher say I'm a-going to die. Am I?"

And Frances, hesitating a moment, answered according to her lights, her eyes fixed on the dying woman's.

"I don't know, Lutie. Only God knows."

"And they say that to save my soul I got to repent. I got to give up Walt an' never see him again in another world, 'cause I been living with him in sin. Is that true?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

And if I don't repent livin' with him and being happy, I'm a-goin' to hell—maybe to-night. Is it true? Is it true? For I can't repent; I can't. I'm glad." Through the tortured anguish of her voice there sang a note of triumph.

As she listened, Frances felt herself as one alone on a midnight sea, moonless, starless; the waters rose blacker and higher, the great waves threatening to engulf her. The truth, that rock on which she must plant her feet—where was it? Did it lie in the dogmas and doctrines she had unquestioningly accepted, the moral and religious axioms which she had taken without thought or reflection to be the eternal verities? She had condemned Mrs. Thomas from the narrowness of her standards; was this new distrust of those standards a mere reaction from a too rigid but nevertheless correct ideal, and therefore a subtle form of temptation?

Lutie had asked for the truth and she had promised to give it. Oh, God! What was the truth? There was nowhere to turn, no one to turn to. The answer must come from herself, from her own deep, eternal convictions, from the depths of her soul. She looked downward at the girl on the bed, the butterfly, the glory of her iridescent wings shrivelled by burning suns and torn by beating rains, and there welled up from the depths of her soul a great wave of love, which rolled out over the black waters of her doubt and stilled their clamour.

"The truth, Missioner, the truth! Am I goin' to hell—maybe to-night?"

THE NEW MISSIONER

"No." Frances's form seemed to dilate, her voice rang like a trumpet. "That's a lie. A cruel, hard, wicked lie. You're going to have your chance, Lutie. Something you've never had before." She dropped on her knees and pressed the frail hands in hers. "Be glad, Lutie. It's all love and beauty; there's nothing else."

For a moment the girl gazed at her fearfully, not daring to believe, and then she reflected the white transfiguration of the Missionary's face, the mystic rapture of her eyes. A change so swift as to seem a miracle passed over her face, the lines faded, the furrows of her brow were smoothed out as if by the touch of a healing hand; on her lips was a smile like a child's.

She turned to Garvin and was about to speak, when she paused and listened. Frances and Garvin, surprised, listened, too; but there was no sound save the sigh of the perpetual wind about the house.

"Don't you hear it, Walt—the whistle of that train—the train you took me away on—straight into heaven—straight—into——"

Her voice failed; but in her dimming eyes lingered the ecstatic vision; on her lips was the dreaming child's smile. And in the first sweep of that strange and solemn wind which blows before the dawn, the veering, faint flame of Garvin's light-o'-love was snuffed out.

CHAPTER TWELVE

BESET by an intense physical and mental weariness, the week which followed Lutie's death remained in Frances's memory as a season of gloom and confusion, punctuated by the comments of Mrs. Nitschkan and her circle, the sobs of Ethel and the platitudes of Carrothers, to whom Garvin had made public amends for past affronts by asking him to conduct the funeral services.

But far more than Ethel's tears or Mrs. Thomas's sighs did Carrothers's consolatory offices, confined to remarks of a tritely comforting nature, wear upon Frances's spirit; and yet, had she but known it, the "lunger preacher" showed her a real, if unconscious, mercy by reserving his most stirring commonplaces for the burst of oratory which he felt fitly signalled so ornate and flower-decked an occasion as Lutie's funeral.

As he announced at the close of an hour's shrill and stumbling address, his few words were invested with a double significance, and served, not only to pay tribute to the dead, but were also a valedictory to his profession.

His voice shook plaintively and tears filled his eyes as he attributed this act of renunciation to his failing health, which required an outdoor occupation for its restoration. But it is doubtful if he was wholly de-

THE NEW MISSIONER

serving of the sympathy he thus exacted, for as a shepherd of souls he had ever found the pasturage offered him poor and scant; and the carpentering trade, to which he now eagerly turned, satisfied all the yearnings of his soul and gave play to the real skill of his hands.

To the censorious, it may have appeared that Carrothers dwelt more upon his transit from one activity to another than upon Lutie's passing from life to death; but Zenith was not disposed to cavil. The double-barrelled oration, the elaborate preparations, the heavily gorgeous ceremonial, all satisfied to the full the village sense of importance. If the eyes of the world were not upon the camp now, they should be, and that reflection was in itself ample cause for pride; but through those wearing days preceding the funeral Frances was conscious of an ever-increasing admiration for Garvin. He was constantly appealed to to decide matters of opinion—the proper width of satin ribbon—roses or lilies—which of the various costly laces should enshroud the frail figure which lay in sculptured, alabaster indifference to the gauds with which she had struggled so feverishly to conceal and decorate the menacing shape of Death.

Garvin gave to these matters his complete, if often perplexed, consideration. It was evident that he was determined that everything, even down to the smallest detail, should be directed in accordance with what Lutie would have preferred and what he personally loathed; but as soon as the last possible tribute, the most infini-

CHAPTER TWELVE

tesimal grain of "mint, anise, and cummin" had been paid, he had clasped Frances's hand strongly for a moment, muttered some broken words of appreciation of her kindness, and journeyed away, none knew whither. That he had taken Angel with him, in charge of two Chinese servants, was, however, a matter of heartfelt congratulation throughout the village.

"My patience!" said Mrs. Thomas, shaking her head solemnly. "Every woman in this camp ought to be right down on her marrow-bones praisin' the Lord that Walt didn't ask none of us to keep that child while he was gone. He told several of my gentlemen friends that he was going away, an' one of 'em mentioned it the other evenin' while I was entertainin' callers, just spoke of it casual-like, you know, the way men do. My patience! It give me such a turn that I mos' fainted dead away. I says real quick to Dan Mayhew, 'Hand me that newspaper to fan with.' 'Air you sick, Marthy?' he asks. 'Not but what I may be worse,' I answers; an' I tell you I spoke from my heart.

"Well, I bore up as well as I could all evening, all the time tryin' my hardest to think what was the best to do, 'cause, as you girls all know, Walt's awful good, an' our men are all more or less obligated to him, an' if he should be goin' to ask me to keep Angel, I didn't see how I could refuse. I thought an' thought about it all night, an' the next mornin' I got up bright an' early, tore my bed to pieces, an' made it up all fresh, turnin' the covers back, ready to jump in at a moment's notice. Then I called the children together, an' I says,

THE NEW MISSIONER

very solemn: 'Now, I want you kids to listen to what Mommie says, an' it's this: I may be took very sick before the day's over; I can't tell yet; but if the Lord should see fit to afflict me, which you'll know by me groanin' in bed, you ain't to show no surprise. If you do, it's a lickin' apiece. You mind now.'"

Her three bosom friends nodded sympathetically. Mrs. Landvetter sighed deeply and clicked her lace needles together, always with her an unfailing sign of mental perturbation. "Ven I heard he go, I tremble all over like yelly for two whole days," she murmured.

"I went a-fishin'," said Mrs. Nitschkan happily.

"I wasted no time in layin' out a strip of red flannel," remarked Mrs. Evans decisively, "pinned it round my arm, so as to have it handy to tie my face up in if Walt come a-knockin' at the door. There's nothin' like an ulcerated tooth in such emergencies. It stands for itself. It don't need no explanations, an' it's known to last a week or more, an' take your mind off everything else."

Her companions hastened to pay her their accustomed tribute of admiration. No matter what the perplexities of the situation, they were so easily dominated by Mrs. Evans that her awed friends could almost see the eagle's wings with which she soared above all mundane difficulties.

"We ain't all got your wits, Effie," Mrs. Thomas gently reminded her, "but in our poor weak way we done the best we could. I had a kind of a scare that

CHAPTER TWELVE

the burden might fall on Missioner, an' I knew if it did, all the half-saved souls in this camp would jus' fall back into the pit, 'cause she'd have time for nothin' but that devil child."

"That's true as you're alive!" agreed Mrs. Nitschkan, rising and buttoning her man's coat about her burly figure. "But entertainin' as you ladies are, I got to go home an' finish my house-cleanin'."

Had a bolt of lightning fallen from a clear sky it would have produced about the same effect as this apparently simple and matter-of-fact announcement. An expression of dismay spread over each slightly paling face, furtive glances were exchanged, and one or two of the ladies opened their mouths as if about to speak, and then hastily closed them; but if Mrs. Nitschkan noticed these signs of consternation, she had reasons of her own for ignoring them, and it was not until she was well out of sight that her companions permitted themselves a free expression of opinion.

"She's a-goin' a-gipsyin' again!" said Mrs. Thomas in a tense, sibilant whisper. "You all know there ain't nothin' else on earth or heaven that can ever make her clean house. Yes, she's a-fixin' to go gipsyin'. Effie," turning appealingly to Mrs. Evans, "can't you stop her?"

"I ain't never been able to before," replied Mrs. Evans shortly, with a tightening of the lips. It was always bitter to her to admit failure.

"Still, she von't neffer leave until after de raspberry festival," advanced Mrs. Landvetter hopefully. "She

THE NEW MISSIONER

von't neffer go till she see how dat turn oudt; vedder Myrtie or Susie gets Preacher."

Mrs. Evans threw her one steel-hard, flashing glance. "They's no question of that kind, Mrs. Landvetter," she answered haughtily. "That matter is practically settled. Myrtle, for all she's so brazen, has no show."

"'Course," agreed Mrs. Thomas, in hasty and specious compromise. "It's what we've all said time an' time again, times without number," her imagination soaring. "But, girls, trouble is comin' thick an' fast on us if Sadie is really thinkin' of goin' gipsyin'. It's worse most than havin' to take care of Angel, for it means her four kids, the worst here or anywheres else, turned loose on this camp."

But to explain in a measure this seemingly imminent catastrophe with which Mrs. Nitschkan's friends felt themselves unable to cope: For some reason, perhaps the call of her gipsy blood, at intervals of two or three years, the mountain woman became beset with longing for a life more thoroughly in the open than the one she enjoyed. She was one of those restless, variable beings to whom the "long, brown path," with its thousand possibilities and surprises, makes an irresistible appeal.

When this desire of the hills came upon her, she stayed not upon the order of her going, but joyously rose up to follow her vagrant impulses.

After some slight pretence of setting her house in order, which she dignified by the name of house-cleaning, she would depart, taking with her a camping outfit,

CHAPTER TWELVE

and would be gone a month, six weeks, two months, at last returning hale, tanned, and hearty, full of new life and laughter, her larder enriched with bear and venison, fish and fowl, and her tongue quick with a score of fisherman's and hunter's yarns to enliven the evenings for her husband and the lean, brown prospectors, when they gathered in her cabin to play poker and pinochle through the long winter nights.

"It ain't no use sayin' a word to her," Mrs. Thomas continued to mourn. "Last time we got wind of her traipsin' off, we got the Bishop to talk to her, an' he did; but as near as I can make out she jus' twisted him around her finger. He says to her in that mild way he has, he says: 'Mis' Nitschkan, frankly now, do you think you ought to evade your sacred duties of wife an' mother, by takin' to the woods this way?'"

"'Gosh a'mighty!' answers Nitschkan, as quick as you please, 'when I been in the woods I see the mother birds shove the young ones outen the nest an' make 'em learn to fly, whether they wanted to or not. They was give their wings to fly with, wasn't they? Now, Bishop, kids was give their hands, an' feet, an' eyes to use, an' the way to teach 'em anything is to make 'em use 'em, an' give their mommie a chanst to rest sometimes. Them kids'll get along all right, if you don't bother.'"

"An' would you believe it, the Bishop says to me afterward: 'I do' know,' he says, 'if Mis' Nitschkan ain't a-showin' a beautiful trust, leavin' her children in the hands of the Lord like that.' But, as I told him, right to his face, too, I wisht she'd take to showin'

THE NEW MISSIONER

her trust some way that wouldn't wear her friends to the bone.

"Well, you girls know how quick I am to feel things, an' for the past week or two I been sensin' trouble, smellin' it like, y' know. Here's Bob Flick up here, an' everybody knows he's been crazy about the Black Pearl for years; an' Shock O'Brien as jealous as can be. I tell you it means a shootin' affray or somethin'."

Mrs. Evans's eyebrows twitched impatiently: "You mean a shootin' scrape or a cuttin' affray, Marthy. Don't you never read the papers? But I guess there's no danger of such things. I guess you think trouble's comin' 'cause you feel kind o' uneasy yourself. Marthy," with an irritated and accusing glance, "it's been some time since Dan Mayhew sassed your best friends and throwed it in their faces that he was goin' down to ask you to marry him; but although he sits in your parlour night after night, you ain't seen fit to confide in them as have hauled you out of too many bogs to be receivin' any such treatment."

At this indictment of her sins of omission Mrs. Thomas's pink and white face flushed deeply and she pouted like a child.

"I ain't made no choice," twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. "It's—it's more fun bein' a widow than I thought it was goin' to be, an'," in defiant pride, "they's more than Dan Mayhew wants me; they's—they's——"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Evans contemptuously, "I make no doubt you're willin' to waste your time on a

CHAPTER TWELVE

dozen of 'em. Seth not six months in his grave, an' you a-entertainin' callers every evenin'. No wonder you're the talk of the camp."

Mrs. Thomas stirred rebelliously. "I don't care, I don't care," she cried; "they're bound to talk about somebody. It ain't so long since they was clatterin' their tongues over you, Effie Evans."

Mrs. Evans winced, but nevertheless maintained her habitual attitude of superior and slightly contemptuous aloofness. "They ain't never spoke light of me with any man," she said with meaning.

The blow drew blood. "That's your blamed luck," retorted Mrs. Thomas bitterly. "You know very well what the Psalmist or somebody, I don't just remember who,—says,—I heard it once in a recitation, 'Be you chaste as ice an' pure as snow, there's always somebody mean an' ornery enough to throw mud at you.'"

"Vell, vell, vell," put in Mrs. Landvetter soothingly, "this ain't a-decidin' vat ve goin' to do about Mis' Nitschkan."

"I don't see nothin' to do at the present time," said Mrs. Evans, "unless we lay the matter before Missioner; she might have some influence with Sadie."

"That's so," assented Mrs. Thomas, with restored cheerfulness; "it's her business to be always ready with spiritual advice an' to bear our burdens for us; though I will say, an' I got a right to say it, for no one feels kinder to her than I do, that she don't always take to burden-bearin' as cheerful an' willin' as a person ought to that's got that privilege."

THE NEW MISSIONER

The three then, having decided upon this course of action, wasted no time in acquainting Frances with the nature of this especial burden they proposed to bind upon her shoulders; but although she listened, as always, patiently to the complaints borne her, the matter of Mrs. Nitschkan's impending gipsying appeared too remote and unimportant an event to command her entire attention; and if the worried little group had realised how quickly she dismissed the subject from her mind, they would have considered Mrs. Thomas fully justified in her criticisms. There were, however, several reasons, reasons more potent and obscure than Frances herself dreamed, for her unusual preoccupation. Not given to introspection—the circumstances of her life had precluded that—she ascribed this strange, new absorption to one cause—the inheritance of wealth which had suddenly befallen her, as with unwonted playfulness she described it to Herries. A poor treasure to the average gold-seeker, but one which the old man at least appreciated; for the mine-owner had left his house open in the care of servants during his absence, and in those last few words with Frances, just before his departure, had besought her to make free use of his library, and she had, with a grateful heart, accepted his invitation.

She had always been fond of reading, but her life had been too busy a one, her faculties too much trained in one direction—the effort “to soothe and to solace, to help and to heal the sick world that leaned on her”—to permit her to give either time or an undivided atten-

CHAPTER TWELVE

tion to books; but Garvin's interest and enthusiasm had aroused and stimulated hers, and she was becoming more and more conscious of developing mental powers which demanded nutriment, and stretched out eager tentacles toward the rich sustenance on his shelves.

With the end in view of obtaining time for reading, she had, with her usual energy and by the exercise of her superior executive ability, so far succeeded in systematising her work that she was able, for the first time in her life, to claim as her own several hours a day. These she devoted to the new and fascinating diversion of reading books; and now and again occurred seasons when, during the long brilliant days of summer, and sometimes far into the fresh, cool nights, she read, read with the avidity of the eager and seeking mind long deprived of food.

In those weeks of Garvin's absence she went through many books, tearing the heart from some of them, and deeply pondering and rereading others. She was too familiar with the Bible not to turn instinctively to the best and most sincere literature; but she was also too lacking in any universal range of acquirement or cultivation, too fully of her own time, adequately to appreciate the great masters of earlier eras, those mellow men of the world whose style but reflected the polished and tempered steel of their minds.

It was to more modern masters, to Emerson and Hawthorne that she naturally and finally turned. To Emerson the mystic in her made quick response, and not only the mystic, but the lover of unhampered, inde-

THE NEW MISSIONER

pendent thought and action. To her he was always "the friend and helper of all who would live the life of the spirit"; and throughout her life, phrases and paragraphs from his essays remained in her memory as shining strands of living light.

She would sometimes sit beside her table far into the night reading his pages, until the lamp burned dim and low; but it was by some instinctive selection of a fitting environment that she reserved Hawthorne for the soft, scented gloom of the pine glades, or the rocky ledges of the hillsides, where the sound of the plashing, falling water sang in her ears and the wind whirled the sun-flecked, flickering shadows of the aspens over her open book. With the wood-silence about her, the wind stirring the hair on her brow, she read those mysterious, beauty-haunted pages, her imagination captured and enthralled until she did not feel the wind, nor see the shadows chase and fly. Into the tales she plunged as might one into some deep, limpid pool, and rose invigorated with the cold, pure refreshment of the "ethereal water."

But she did not always read. There were hours when she wandered up the slopes of the hillsides and into the depths of pine gloom, when she stood on the edge of steeps which fell away so sharply and abysmally that the eye plunged happily through the dense bracken and the brown and purple trunks of the giant pines into the deeps of deer-haunted shadow. Again she would wander to some more level spot, where the pines grew low and spreading, their branches twisted and dis-

CHAPTER TWELVE

torted into strange and grotesque shapes by the mighty mountain winds; but if bent and stunted, they were strong. They had prevailed, and stood but the more deeply rooted in the soil, ever sending out new buttresses against the rushing legions of the enemy. Their flat, mossy tops they spread in air, black, green, blue, russet, silver, in the sea of sunlight they floated on; but beneath the branches brooded the peace won through resistance, and in the long aisles was the dim, mysterious light of the pine woods, sunlight falling through close-meshed nets of green.

It was always very still there; the foot sank noiselessly into the faded brown carpet of last year's needles, and there was fragrance, austere, balsamic—and music.

About the high, white peaks the winds roar and scream, or wail and mourn down the gulches, or whisper and murmur among the aspens and maples; but in the pine forests it sings the songs of the sea; sometimes the rippling melody of the surf washing softly against the shore, and again the organ roll of the solemn, majestic ocean surges; but always the sea music.

Ah, there is magic in the pine forests! One hears untranslatable harmonies; one sees strange subtleties of colour, and the fragrance is the complement of both. Frances loved the pine glooms. She would sometimes spend hours within the shadowy aisles, an ascetic, black-robed figure, with pale, uplifted face, drawn back, it would seem, by the weight of hair; but there was nothing ascetic in her glowing eyes and smiling mouth as she listened to the sea-music the wind sang to the pines,

THE NEW MISSIONER

and inhaled the pine fragrance with a rapture which no flower scents could give her; until the grey, shackling chrysalis of her past life would fall from her and she would feel the soar and lift of wings, while from some depth of being there welled the thrilling impulse of joy.

And daily the world as she had known it in her busy, practical life—a sordid, cruel, and ugly fact—became to her as fugitive and unsubstantial as a smoke wreath. Its boundaries, once so fixed and solid, melted into new and bewildering vistas. She awakened each morning to golden mirages pictured on rainbow horizons. What wonder that her face changed, her smile and her eyes deepened, until Zenith speculated freely upon probable causes. She had a beautiful secret singing in her heart; a secret with an inner meaning still unsuspected by herself. She thought it whispered to her of new worlds, fair, shining worlds of light and beauty, to which she, a shabby, plain, uneducated little Missionary, had discovered the open sesame.

Garvin, too, held the key. Of that she was sure. Had not his face shone and his eyes brightened whenever he spoke to her of books and of nature? It was a secret they two held together.

At last she knew a deep, personal happiness, never dreaming that the causes to which she attributed it were inadequate. But for her, old things were forever passed away and all things were made new. Her nights were white, her days were gold. New streams of life and joy flowed to her from illimitable sources, washing away

CHAPTER TWELVE

old conceptions and revealing to her fresh and shimmering dawns of wonder.

We treat birth and death as vast, far-off events; one the beginning, the other the close of all earthly experiences; but in reality they are daily and hourly episodes in consciousness tending to one end—life. To stagnate is to perish; to stretch out welcoming hands to to-morrow with whatever it may bring is to continue to exist. “Ye must be born again!” is the fiat of life; but equally so is St. Paul’s triumphant pæan: “I die daily.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AUGUST was passing, and as her hours drew to a close she began to spin rainbow veils of illusion all of sun-films and purple hazes. White puffs of seeds floated over the grasses and through the air, and the spiders, eternal spinners, spilled broadcast their silken, silver skeins.

Frances would often stand at her doorway in the morning and watch those floating webs sagging with the diamond sparkle of dewdrops. The snow had melted from all save the highest peaks, the earth was warmed to her heart and lay basking in sun-flooded content, sending up toward the sky the incense of her myriad and delicate fragrances; and because of the happiness in her own heart, Frances grew to know the earth as a mother. She could feel about her the maternal, enfolding arms, and was privileged to listen to what only a few ever hear, the song of the globe as it rolls in its orbit—a song of joy—the eternal joy that lies at the heart of the universe; and in the dim woods of purple shadow, in the arrowy rush of the mountain streams, she caught continual echoes of the insistent whisper: “You are the daughter of my bounteous and teeming life; for you I have spread my broad, clear, happy spaces, for you is the healing silence of my forests, for you I spin my iridescent glories of light and colour.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Then live; it is thus that you express your being which is mine. Live! That is Life's eternal, irrefutable mandate."

And Frances listened, dwelling in her world of dreams. She had had no word from Garvin, and yet she knew, through the subtle avenues of intuition and sympathy, that she was in his thoughts as he was in hers.

In her frequent visits to his library she was often accompanied by Herries, who had long been one of the pensioners of Garvin's intellectual bounty, and although their literary tastes were antipathetic, he and Frances browsed amiably enough over the books, in spite of his somewhat irritating fashion of pulling one volume after another from the shelves, turning over the pages, reading a few words here and there, and calling out in stentorian bitterness: "Lies! Lies!"

One morning when the Missionary and himself had started for the Pierian spring on the flats, the old man's arms full of books which he and she were returning to their proper places on the shelves, Frances paused a moment to speak to Mrs. O'Brien, who was industriously weeding in the little garden before her trim, toy-like house, carefully removing every intruding, way-side plant which had crept among her scarlet geraniums and yellow zinnias flaring crudely in the morning sunshine.

"Don't you find it warm, Mrs. O'Brien, weeding without a hat?" called Frances.

"No-o." The dancer rose slowly to her feet and

THE NEW MISSIONER

came toward them with her languid and inimitable grace. "No, I like the heat. Was you ever down in the desert, Missioner?" she asked, with apparent irrelevance, leaning her elbows on the bars of the gate and sinking her chin in the palms of her hands.

The mountains afforded a blue and green background, serene, remote, in the sun-flooded atmosphere; but in all this harmony of nature, the Black Pearl, in her dull blue dress, standing among the scentless red and yellow flowers of her garden. was a startling and nerve-thrilling discord.

"The desert!" repeated Frances in a surprised tone. "Why, yes; I lived there for a while."

"An' me," drawled Mrs. O'Brien in her soft, lazy voice. "I don't like the mountains. I always feel like they was goin' to fall on me an' smother me. An' you get to the top of 'em where you think you can breathe an' there's ranges an' ranges beyond. I want places where they ain't nothin' to shut you in." rebelliously; "where you can feel free."

Frances gazed at her with puzzled eyes; but the Pearl's wistful, resentful glance was far beyond her. "Perhaps the rare air doesn't agree with you," suggested the Missionary.

"Oh, I'm well enough. I'm always well. I guess maybe I'm pinin' for a little excitement," she smiled her crooked, fascinating smile at Herries.

"Then you need look no further." His cold blue eyes held the Pearl's veiled gaze for a moment, and then it wandered to the hills she loathed. He leaned

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

against the paling fence watching her, a figure of distinction even in his clean, shrunken, patched clothes and heavy boots. Over his flannel shirt flowed his white beard, and his strong profile was outlined against the gold light of the morning—a profile hawk-like, cruel and fine, with the long droop of the lids at the corners over the keen eyes, the sharp aquiline curve of the nose, the bitter, ironic lines of the mouth.

“Excitement!” he exclaimed. “You might travel the world over and you wouldn’t find as much excitement in the whole journey as you can get any day in Zenith. Why, Mrs. O’Brien, this camp fairly tingles with excitement. There is the true neighbourly spirit here. They know not only what is going on in your house, but in your soul.” He laughed his single, harsh croak. “Here’s the raspberry social coming on. It may seem only a dance and a supper to you; but to us that have got any sporting blood in us, it’s the last of a match game, where Myrtle Swanstrom and Mrs. Evans are to play off their finals. Out in the world, beyond those blue mountains, they have their whist and chess tournaments and play for some tuppenny stake or other; but in Zenith the stakes are hearts and lives. If it ain’t exciting watching that kind of a game, what is? And it will be exciting all right. Frank McGuire has stated publicly that he’ll have his answer that night.”

“I didn’t think of it so until you put me wise,” the Pearl smiled cynically and understandingly. “I been used to seein’ the game played that way myself.”

THE NEW MISSIONER

The conversation seemed to Frances to have, in some way, slipped beyond her. She looked from Mrs. O'Brien to Herries with a slightly bewildered expression, and the Black Pearl, seeing it, with the faintest of shrugs and the smallest of expressive glances, the mere flutter of an eyelid toward Herries, changed the subject.

"How are you getting along without Angel, Mr. Herries?"

"I'm too busy looking after her infernal pets to miss her much. Here's where her damnable coon-cat, appropriately called Lambie, scratched me yesterday." He held up a torn finger. "And if I hadn't had on my high boots 'White Puppy,' as vicious a bull as ever barked, would have taken a piece out of my leg this morning. Her parrot and her squirrels do their best to nip me, too. Her last words were: 'Be tareful how you handle 'em, Herries, 'ay's full of ginger.'" The old man's face shone with pride. "She said she was going to bring a monkey back with her, and she will, too, if she stays in the same mind. It wouldn't surprise me if she brought a lion-cub, and she'd tame it, mind you; she'd tame it."

"Ain't she the queer one, though?" commented the Pearl. "She certainly——" She broke off suddenly and peered up the road. "Why, here come Ethel and Mr. Campbell. Ethel, she's a-tryin' to save my soul, now that Mis' Garvin's passed beyond her experiments." She laughed mockingly, and Frances failed to repress a slight start. Mrs. O'Brien fortunately laughed rarely,

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

but when she did, it was apt to jar on the nerves of her hearers, provided they were at all sensitive. It was low laughter, but coarse and curiously unmodulated.

Down the road, a faint cloud of dust rising about them, came the Salvation Army girl and old Andrew Campbell; Ethel, slim and swaying in her straight blue gown, her bonnet swung from her arm by the strings, and the sun turning the pale gold of her hair to shining silver strands.

As for Mr. Campbell, who stepped out firmly by her side, holding a staff taller than himself, he seemed to have undergone some vital and transforming change. He wore his Sunday suit of shiny, black broadcloth, and over his gleaming white shirt flowed a black silk necktie, this last a most unaccustomed concession to the conventionalities. The tangled mass of hair which usually hung about his head and face in wild disorder was combed and brushed into a semblance of beard and whisker. The look of blank dreaming had passed from his eyes, and, as Frances immediately noted, they wore, for the first time, according to her observation, an expression of limpid tranquillity.

"We're a-goin' to Mount Tabor," called out Ethel to the little group at the gate before she reached them, breathless with the importance of her tidings. "Mr. Campbell's goin' to address a meetin' this afternoon, an' maybe to-night. Yes, he is," as if meeting doubt of her statement. "They've been a-wantin' him for a good long time, but though I been a-coaxin' him day in an' day out, I couldn't get him to say he'd go."

THE NEW MISSIONER

"How could I when my lips were sealed?" asked Campbell. "There was naught to say."

"But it's all right now," returned Ethel, in quick and happy assurance. "The Word came to you in the night. Goodness!" turning to the others, "I don't want to live through another such week as this last one. Me just wild for him to accept this invitation and the folks over there to Mount Tabor wonderin' why we was actin' so queer an' kind of holdin' off: an' I couldn't tell 'em, 'cause they'd never understand in a thousand years."

"Then the Word came, the swift, dividing sword of the Word," Campbell's sonorous voice pealed out like a chant of exultation. The strange change that this coming of the Word, as he called it, always brought, was now especially manifest in him. He was a new creature, erect, alert, informed with initiative and decision.

He spoke with such triumphant assurance, such poignant conviction, that for a brief moment, to Frances at least, the tongues of fire seemed almost to glow in his eyes and to flicker about his head. There was victory in his glance, and the mystic and dreamer in the Missionary saw in one quickly obscure moment of belief this half-mad old man as one of earth's conquerors.

At his first words Ethel had lifted her hand, as if to still the very breeze that swept over the mountains, swayed the garish flowers of the Black Pearl's garden, stirred the grasses by the wayside, and then dropped with a falling sigh into the road itself to send up thin spirals and faint clouds of dust; and now, with

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

her hand so upheld, she stood gazing at him with the ecstatic eyes of the disciple.

Frances, too, leaned forward, the hunger for righteousness on her face. She had forgotten her ivory gates and her splendid worlds, with their fair courts and delicate pleasantries. There was something beyond these, and Campbell had spoken of it. He had found it. Her arms had fallen by her side, her dark, earnest gaze hung on the old man as if awaiting a revelation.

The moment of silence was so full of emotion that even in the clear morning sunlight, beside the Black Pearl's gaudy flowers, there was not one of the little group who did not feel in the light wind which lifted their hair and brushed their cheeks the intangible, floating wings of awe and wonder.

"But, Ethel," Campbell gripped her by the arm and planted his tall staff firmly on the ground, "we must be about our business, our Father's business." The ineffable tenderness of his words expressed itself fitly through the solemn music of his voice. The girl and himself took a step forward, and then he paused and looked back; a shadow passed over his face and he sighed. "A message to these," laying a detaining hand upon Ethel's arm. "When the Word comes, I see far into the unseen, and this world is a dim, grey shadow—a mist that passes." He peered into Frances's face. "Roses! Nay, a crown. The thistles sting and prick; but they burst into queen's purple." He sighed again, and dejection fell over him. Then he turned his eyes upon the Black Pearl, holding her with his clear, intense

THE NEW MISSIONER

gaze. "Repent ye!" he cried, with a shudder. "Repent ye! Now, now, lest ye be purified as by fire. Lest ye? Ye will. Your heart, which is as dead as Sodom and Gomorrah, will be swept by fire. Water cannot cleanse it. I have given you the Word from beyond the veil. Come, Ethel."

"Yes, Mr. Campbell." It was almost as if she had murmured "Raboni."

Without a word the three at the gate watched the pair, the little old man and the tall young girl trudging on through the shimmering, golden flood of the morning.

"My Lord!" said the Pearl at last. "My Lord! are they both crazy, or is it something else?"

"I was taught many stern doctrines in my youth," Herries laughed shortly, "and all I have retained is a belief in original sin." He showed his long teeth. "But I've got something in my blood—I'm a Scotchman, and what Campbell calls his mysteries are to many of us the realities. We sense things the world refuses to accept; but," harking back to an old cry, "crazy or not, the old man saved Ethel."

"Oh, Ethel!" cried Mrs. O'Brien contemptuously. "She's just one that opens her mouth and swallows everything you give her. But, my Lord!" in a burst of passionate impatience, "who wouldn't be half cracked if they could get a look on their faces like they had! Oh, if you could only feel dead sure of things like they do, what's the difference whether you're believin' lies or truth—if you could only believe 'em?"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Why, Missioner," to Frances, "the Padre down in the desert, he was a good, kind old soul, an' he used to hand me out a line of talk about repentin' an' believin' an' all that, an' I tried to, honest, I did; but 'twas no good—all lies. Yet," with a sort of wild wistfulness, "I often think if a person could just be free—really free——"

"Free!" cried Herries scornfully. "Who's free? We're all slaves of other people or ourselves; and if we ever do succeed in getting our heads out of one noose, we run and stick 'em into another. Isn't it so, Missioner?"

But Frances, as if acting upon a sudden impulse, had started forward that she might overtake Ethel and Campbell, and then had paused, irresolutely. Herries and the Black Pearl were forgotten, even the books on Garvin's shelves; for the spirit of her, the soul of the dreamer and mystic, stirred and yearned.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE day of the momentous and eagerly anticipated raspberry festival had finally arrived, and Zenith, as one man, made joyous preparation to see Myrtle and Mrs. Evans play off their finals, although outwardly professing merely a pious desire to show approval of the zeal of the Aid Society, under whose competent management the festival was to be given, the proceeds of the dancing and refreshment privileges to go for a new melodeon to be purchased for the church.

Just as the afternoon sun was sinking behind the peaks, Mrs. Nitschkan, who was on the entertainment committee for the evening, and who, if indications counted for anything, would, as usual, be late, hastened up Sunshine Avenue toward her home, fishing rod in hand and a basket of brook trout over her arm. As she passed the O'Brien home she paused to speak to the Black Pearl, who stood in her own doorway.

"Hello, Pearl!" called the hardy gipsy jovially. "How would you like a mess of brook trout?"

"First rate," responded the Pearl heartily. "You're all right, Nitschkan, even if you are crazy enough to live up in these old mountains—the desert's the place."

Mrs. Nitschkan shook her head. "The mountains for mine," she said emphatically. "Look at the fishin' an'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

the huntin'; nice cool streams to wade in an' fish; nice cool woods to hunt in, an' you never know when you're a-comin' around a corner an' meet a bear or a deer. It's sure the woods fer mine. I——" She stopped and peered curiously into the other woman's face.

"What's that mark on your forehead, Pearl? You must have got an awful whack some way."

The Pearl turned her vague gaze from the distant peaks, with the last red glow of the sun on their shining summits, and became suddenly alive to the mundane. "Oh, that!" She ran her fingers across her brow and laughed. Her slightly crooked mouth broke into dimples and there was a cool deviltry in the sidelong glance she threw at the gipsy. "Why, Shock give me that three or four days ago. I can't go to the festival to-night unless I can get it powdered up good enough to cover it."

The mountain woman surveyed her a moment in tolerant, dispassionate curiosity. "Why can't you leave the boys alone, Pearl?" she asked finally. "They ain't none of 'em here nor anywheres else that's worth standin' a lickin' for."

"You bet," agreed Mrs. O'Brien indifferently, but with perfect acquiescence. "But, say, Nitschkan, I wasn't doin' a thing—just standin' at the gate, talkin' to a—a—fellow when Shock come down the road. Well, I wisht you'd 'a' seen him!" the reminiscent coquetry of her smile brightening her weary eyes. "That French-Irish face of his'n was blacker 'n a thunder-cloud an' his eyes was a-blazin' fire. We had it hot an'

THE NEW MISSIONER

heavy about all night. Shock, you know him; he can't bear to see another man so much as look at me."

"Then what you always a-teasin' him for, Pearl?" asked Mrs. Nitschkan with indubitable reason and practicality.

"I do' know," with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "I always been used to the boys. They know an' I know that I wouldn't look at one of 'em now; but Shock, the big fool, he don't know nothin', an' Lord! but he's jealous."

"Jealous! Catsfoot!" replied Mrs. Nitschkan with sturdy scorn. "I'd like to see any man kick an' cuff me about as he pleases; that's what I'd like to see, an' you always yellin' about bein' free!"

There were tiny flickers of fire in Mrs. O'Brien's eyes. The slow, heavy crimson crept up under her dark skin and her thin, curving mouth became pointed and animal. The upper lip curled slightly on either side and showed two white pointed teeth like a wolf's.

"You think you're smart, don't you, Sadie Nitschkan?" in a coarse, muffled scream; "you think you know a thing or two. Well, let me tell you, once an' fer all, you don't. You think I'd stay with any man I didn't want to? Why, all hell couldn't hold me. You ask any of the boys down in the desert. They'd laugh in your face. They know I'd knife him without countin' one, two, three. Oh, you—you—tramp woman! You know a lot about huntin' an' fishin'; but you know a mighty little about women. You ain't never been one."

"Now, Pearl, there ain't no occasion to spit like a

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

cat," returned Mrs. Nitschkan, unmoved by these taunts. "An' if you give me much more sass, I'll jerk you over the fence and throw you out in the road. Oh!" with a scornful laugh, "I ain't a mite afeared of that knife they say you always keep down in your stockin'."

But Mrs. O'Brien's tempest of anger had fallen to calm as quickly as it had flamed. Without further notice of her companion, she dropped her face into the cup of her hands and again gazed idly out at the rapidly blurring outlines of the hills.

"Bob Flick's here," advanced Mrs. Nitschkan in a casual and friendly tone, "but 'course you know. He's a-stayin' at our house. He's a-goin' to deal faro bank here for a while. He was a-talkin' last night to Jack an' me, an' he jus' couldn't get over you bein' here this away. 'Lord!' he says, over an' over again. 'It do beat everything to see the Pearl livin' up here so plain. Why,' he says, 'I shouldn't wonder if she's even forgot how to cross her feet—her that's danced in every town in the Southwest.'"

Pearl laughed. "I guess I ain't forgot," lazily. Then her whole appearance changed; the listlessness vanished from her face. "Here comes Shock!" she said.

"Oh," murmured Mrs. Nitschkan with a hurried glance at O'Brien, who hastened down the mountain road, his dinner pail over his arm.

"Wait a minute," said the Pearl in a rapid whisper. "I want to see Bob Flick. You tell him to be at the raspberry social to-night."

THE NEW MISSIONER

Appalled by her daring, Mrs. Nitschkan glanced apprehensively at O'Brien, almost at her elbow, and then hurried on; but after a few paces, she turned, like Lot's wife, to look back.

The Black Pearl, her arm through her husband's, was sauntering up the narrow path which led from the gate to the cottage. It was only when she walked that she showed to the full, her exquisite and undulating grace.

"I jus' been waterin' the flowers, Shock, while I was waitin' for you," her lazy, colourless voice was full of animation. "Don't they look great?" She stooped, and breaking off a scarlet geranium, thrust it into her hair.

"It jus' seems like I can't get enough reds an' yellows," complained Mrs. O'Brien. "But I tell you what, Shock, this garden rests my eyes a whole lot after lookin' out at those old mountains with snow on their tops. Ugh!" she shivered.

Jacques laughed. "What else you been doin', Pearl, besides waterin' the garden?"

"I finished my dress to wear to the raspberry social to-night." She stepped back from him that he might the better observe her handiwork. She had fashioned some cheap, pink material so that it fell as soft as crepe into wonderful long lines about her slender height. "Do you like it, Shock?" She tilted her head sideways and looked at him with her crooked, heart-shattering smile.

"Yes." He caught her hand and drew her toward him. "Air you glad to see me, Pearl?"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Air I glad to see you? Air I glad to see you? No. Understand once an' fer all, No."

They laughed, and he pulled her sunburned head to his breast and kissed the faint purple bruise on her brow.

"Crazy!" She still laughed and dragged at his hand. "Come on in and eat your supper."

"Crazy's the word," philosophised Mrs. Nitschkan, shaking her head as she walked on. "Seems to me the Pearl's possessed. She sure acts like she's wild about Shock, an' yet, she's sendin' word to Bob Flick to meet her this evenin' at the festival. That's what comes of bein' a hussy. But Lord! I got to hurry, for I wouldn't miss that social to-night for all that's goin'."

She but voiced the universal sentiment of the village. Already "supper things" were being hastily cleared away, and blinds were drawn that no delay might be caused by the ceremony of dressing.

With that sixth sense common in isolated communities, where the interest in the drama before one's eyes is intense and absorbing, because at any moment the spectator may be called from the seclusion of the audience to take his place among the actors before the footlights, the participators in the raspberry festival were all intuitively aware that the immanent, psychological moment was at hand. There was no question of mistake or of postponement. The hour had struck.

Frances felt it and was vaguely troubled and perplexed. She realised with a feeling of depression that, so far as one might judge, the seed she had sown had

THE NEW MISSIONER

fallen among the rocks, for Myrtle was more audacious than ever in her skirmishes with the enemy. The subtle intimation communicated itself to Mrs. Evans and "her click," and for once, that close and assured corporation was slightly irresolute.

"I know," muttered Mrs. Evans, as she and Mrs. Thomas wended their way toward the Town Hall, the scene of the festivity, "that this 'll be the last time I wear myself to skin an' bone to get any girl married. I ask you, Mis' Thomas, if Susie Hazen has ever said more than 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' to Preacher, an' if she ain't et like a wolf at every tea party we've give 'em? Now you know as well as I do, that no girl's goin' to get house an' home, husband an' children, actin' that way. I will say for Myrtle that she certainly is enterprisin'."

"How true it is," said Mrs. Thomas, "that God helps those that helps theirselves. Well, here we are at the door."

The Town Hall was alight with a dozen lamps in brackets on the walls; the main part of the floor had been cleared for dancing, and polished until it shone; while at the lower end were placed long tables where raspberries and ice cream were served by the members of the Aid Society.

Interest was naturally centred in Myrtle and the "lunger preacher," as it was understood that Frank McGuire could not get down from the mine until after nine o'clock. Carrothers, placid and even gay in a bleating and lamb-like manner, was probably the only person

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

present who was not enjoying the tense expectancy of a dramatic *dénouement*. He, one of the chief actors before the curtain, was in the paradoxical position of not knowing that he had assumed a leading rôle.

Curiosity was somewhat deflected by the appearance of the Black Pearl, who was presumably successful in powdering her bruise; but who arrived rather late, and greatly disappointed Zenith by refusing all invitations to dance. Bob Flick, too, had sauntered in a few moments afterwards, so if the principal performance in the large tent was somewhat delayed, there were not lacking side shows to keep up the interest of the spectators.

Flick was a tall, slow-moving fellow, with the pale impassive face of the professional gambler. There were tense lines about his mouth, and the deep crows' feet about his eyes betokened that he had long lived in the lands of vivid sunlight. For a few moments he stood leaning against the door, exchanging a curt word now and again with an acquaintance; but for the most part gazing with cold, narrowed eyes at Mrs. O'Brien, who sat, lazy and indifferent, with a faint smile on her scornful mouth, while about her chair eddied a boisterous court, which, however it might vary as to individuals, never diminished in size.

As far as one might judge, she made no especial effort to attract, when she spoke at all it was in monosyllables, though occasionally she interjected a brief word into the general conversation; but in the main she sat silent,

THE NEW MISSIONER

listless ; inherently, perhaps unconsciously, man-compelling.

It was not, however, until Flick finally moved across the room and took his stand doggedly and immovably beside her chair, that she showed any signs of animation, although she still persisted in refusing his, as well as all other invitations to dance.

“No, I don’t want to dance,” her soft, sliding voice held the note of decision. “Come on, Bob, sit down here beside me an’ tell me the news. How’s Jim Hurd ; an’ was it true he got shot over the cards ? An’ Frank Applewaite ? Did he, honest, run off with a Greaser girl, like one of the boys told me ? Oh, I’m hungry for the news. Have they,”—with a wistful coquetry—“have they plumb forgot me yet, Bob ? ”

“I should say not,”—with emphasis. “But it does seem funny to see you like this, Pearl, with jus’ that plain, gold ring on your finger. Why, I was a-talkin’ to a jeweller down in Tucson the other day an’ he says : ‘I wonder if I could get the Black Pearl’s necklace ? She’s got the finest matched string of emeralds I ever see.’ ”

“Well, he’ll never get ’em,” with smiling, indifferent finality.

“What did you do with ’em, Pearl ? ” asked Flick, curiously. “Sell ’em ? ”

“Sell ’em ? No. I give ’em to Father Gonzales, the night before he married Shock an’ me. I guess he’s hung ’em around the neck of the Virgin, or maybe he’s keepin’ the poor in luxury on ’em yet. Lord ! Can’t you

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

hear those old Mission bells, kind o' cracked and sweet an' far away? They always sounded like Time and Eternity to me. Oh, Bob, there ain't nothin' like the desert, is there? I can't get used to havin' the mountains so close. I feel all the time like they was a-crowdin' an' a-pushin' me. I want to be where I can breathe."

The gambler laughed outright. "Well, you ain't so changed, after all," he said, and some new almost exultant note rang in his voice. "Same old cry. Jim Hurd was a-speakin' to me, only a little while back, of the old days, an' he says: 'Can't you see the Pearl a flingin' up her arms an' sayin': "I want to be free"? I wonder what ailed that girl?' he said. 'She was always a-goin' on about wantin' to be free. Why how,' he says, 'could anyone be freer 'an her? When she got tired of one place, she was off to the next. Her pockets was always full of money, an' her fingers blazin' with coloured stones. If that ain't bein' free,' he said, 'I'd like to know what is.'"

"Those rings wasn't half so pretty nor so bright as the beetles that crawled out in the sand when you turned over a stone." The veil of moodiness had again fallen over her eyes.

"I kin just smell trouble in the air," sighed Mrs. Thomas at the farther end of the hall, pausing in her occupation of serving raspberries into small saucers, with a very large iron spoon. "Myrtle cavortin', an' the Pearl carryin' on with Bob Flick! You see if they ain't some shots passed before we get home. An' ain't it a high note for the Pearl not to dance. That's always

THE NEW MISSIONER

the way with them perffessionals; they're so contrary that they take pleasure in puttin' their lights under bushels just to spite folks. My!" as Myrtle floated by her, "ain't that girl wild to-night! Well," sighing heavily, "she'll be gnashin' her teeth before mornin'. That's sure."

In truth, Myrtle was dancing indefatigably, the gayest of the gay, when Frances laid a detaining hand on her arm. "Myrtle," she begged, "put a stop to all this nonsense and talk to-night. Decide one way or another; Frank will soon be here now."

Myrtle's soft little face had grown hard, and her eyes glittered. There was a worried line or so about her mouth. "I can't help it," she cried. "I can't stand it to have Mis' Evans crowin' over me to the end of my days, an' sayin' I took Frank 'cause I couldn't get Preacher. Look at her now, grinnin' 'cause Preacher an' Susie's talkin' t'gether. She's a-drivin' me to it, Missioner. She's a-drivin' me sure to take him."

"But you told me he did not care for you," exclaimed Frances, in a tone at once impatient and bewildered.

"They ain't none of them so hard to get," said the girl with moody scorn. "I ain't fished for trout all my life in these mountains an' not know how to ketch a man."

A partner claimed her, and she danced away, her white dress fluttering through the moving figures about the hall. When she came to a stop at last, it was in the centre of a laughing, gasping group.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

But suddenly their laughter, which had been ringing to the ceiling, faltered and died, silenced by a whisper which had run like lightning through the room. There was a moment's commotion. Men consulted briefly and started toward the door, while women hastily gathered up babies.

"What is it?" asked Frances of a man who passed her.

"Something wrong at The Gold Dirt. Three of the boys ain't come down."

Myrtle clutched her arm. "Frank!" she gasped. "He's workin' in The Gold Dirt, an' if it wasn't him, he'd been here before. Come on!" And pulling the Missionary strongly by the hand, she ran with her down the steps leading to the road.

Undisturbed by the confusion about her, Mrs. Evans stood by the deserted tables, calmly issuing orders. "You fetch all the ground coffee, Nitschkan. We'll need it up there. I'll take a basket of cups, an' you carry the pots, Mis' Thomas. Mis' Landvetter, gather up all the shawls that's left, an' don't forget to bring the matches. Let the kids stay here an' eat up the cream an' berries, no use wastin' 'em. Now you all ready? Then we'll start."

The wagon road up the mountain was black with people. Men with picks and lanterns in their hands, and women whose faces showed white under the shawls they had hastily thrown over their heads.

"What is it?" again asked Frances of a man they met hurrying down the road.

THE NEW MISSIONER

“An explosion in The Gold Dirt,” he answered. “Three of the boys was down on the fifth level to do some blastin’. They signalled for the cage and the engineer sent it down; but they never signalled for it to be lifted. I guess they waited too long after they touched off their fuses.”

“Who were they?” cried Myrtle.

“I ain’t got no time to talk,” he called back over his shoulder. “I’m a-goin’ for a doctor.”

“Oh,” wailed the girl, her fingers sinking painfully deep in the Missionary’s arm; but after that outcry, she made no further demonstration. She was a daughter of the mountains and knew that no breath must be wasted in lamentations. There was a long climb before them.

Once the clatter of hoofs behind them caused her to shiver convulsively.

“I wonder who it is?” said Frances, as a man on horseback pushed through the crowd on foot, and on up the slope.

“The surgeon,” replied Myrtle, in a dull, muffled voice.

When at last they reached the mine, it was a weird and striking scene which met their eyes, solemn, vivid, almost awe-inspiring. The first arrivals with a practicality acquired in a life spent in battling with necessity, had built great, flaring bonfires of pitchpine logs. The red flames with their dense clouds of pitchy smoke leaped up against a background of violet-black mountains with the snow-covered peaks, and illuminated the

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

bare wooden engine house and the huge, slate-coloured ore dumps.

Myrtle stood on the crest of the hill, tense, waiting. All her soft, peachy prettiness had vanished, showing a facial outline hard and stern. As Mrs. Evans panted up beside her, the girl caught that tiny woman by the arms, pinioning them to her sides, and lifted her off her feet.

In an instant Mrs. Nitschkan's man's coat sleeve was rolled up and her bare great-muscled arm shot out its clenched fist in Myrtle's face.

"Don't you hurt her, Myrtle," she warned. "If you do, I'll break your jaw as sure as I'm a-standin' here."

"What do I care?" said Myrtle. "But I'll tell you this; this is a judgment on me and I ain't goin' to be punished alone, when there's others deserves it too. Her man's one of the best miners in the camp, an' he's got to go down an' bring out mine."

Mrs. Evans, completely in the power of the younger and larger woman, had merely cocked her head and gazed at her with cool defiance; but now her expression changed. In the world, so in Zenith. The eternal feminine knows modification, but no change. There had been warfare between herself and Myrtle; but at the first hint of trouble, the hatchet was buried, the ministrations began.

"You bet he'll go down, Myrtle, an' in the first cage. Put me down on the ground an' I'll see to it."

In the interval of waiting the women busied themselves in making coffee for the miners, and the always

THE NEW MISSIONER

increasing crowd lingered breathlessly, and for the most part, silently. Myrtle had thrown herself on the ground and lay with her head in the Missionary's lap. Once Carrothers approached her and with a few words attempted to console and hearten her; but she threw out her hand with the impatient gesture of one waving away a fly.

"Aw, shut up!" she muttered. "I'd rather hear Mis' Nitschkan swear."

"Gosh a'mighty, child!" said that bluff King Hal in petticoats, "you mustn't take on this way. You got to get used to this. We've all seen our men brung out bloody an' smashed, times without number, ain't we, Mis' Evans?"

"Every bone in Sile's body's been broke in these blasted mines," returned that lady laconically. "Lift up your head, Myrtie, an' drink this nice hot coffee."

"Yes, take the blessed comfort of it," coaxed Mrs. Thomas. "My patience! Ain't it somethin' beautiful the way we take on when accidents happen to them, an' what do they do fer us in pain or grief? I've seen a man sit with his feet up on the kitchen stove readin' a newspaper an' never turnin' a hair, while his wife was screamin' herself black in the face with the strikes in the next room. Cheer up, Myrtie! They ain't no man worth it."

"Frank is," sobbed Myrtle. "I don't care if the rest is blown to pieces; one of 'em's a drunken Polack, an' the other's the dead-broke son of an English lord, an' it don't make no difference about them."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

This exposition of an essentially feminine point of view occasioned no surprise among her sympathisers.

"That's the way we all feel when it comes to our man, no matter how cranky he may be; or our kids, no matter how devilish they are," murmured Mrs. Thomas, who took an artistic delight in her ability to mourn thoroughly and completely with those who mourn.

The slow, dragging watches of the night wore painfully away; and at last, after hours of waiting, it was announced that the miners had dug through the debris. Finally, one man, the drunken Polack, was borne out unconscious, injured; the surgeon worked over him. Then another, "the dead-broke son of an English lord"; and at last, exhausted, almost asphyxiated, his arm hanging helpless, Frank McGuire.

Like a flash, Myrtle burst through the crowd and threw her arms about him before their world. The smile she lifted to his dazed and doubting glance was full of rapture and relief, of a thousand capitulations and promises, and it fell like sunshine upon him, melting the winter of his discontent.

"Myrtle," he murmured. "Myrtle, are you sure?"

"Sure!" she cried in a burst of sobs. "I always been sure; but I was born so devilish that I never could take a dare."

Dawn was just breaking over the mountains when a little cavalcade wound down the hill. McGuire on a dusty, grey burro, was supported by Carrothers on one side, and by Myrtle on the other. They were environed by Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Nitschkan, Mrs.

THE NEW MISSIONER

Landvetter and the "Missioner," bearing shawls, coffee utensils and baskets. In the reaction from the suspense and anxiety of the night, these ladies had become jocular, almost to hilarity, and the conversation frequently verged on that form of banter known as rude.

"Preacher and Missioner had better be gettin' ready to officiate at a weddin' soon, hadn't they, Frank?" called Mrs. Nitschkan jovially.

"Maybe Preacher 'll be thinkin' of a weddin' on his own hook." Myrtle's glance was still inherently coquettish. "Maybe that girl back in Illinois——"

Carrothers flushed to the roots of his hair. "She writes she thinks she'll like it here." Then he took his courage in both hands: "It's—it's—to be at Christmas."

Of the disconcerted little group behind the burro, now huddling together and gazing at each other with round eyes, Mrs. Thomas alone retained her poise.

"Ain't they the critters for you!" she exclaimed, gazing admiringly at Carrothers's back. "They's two games they can sure beat us at—poker and love. Here were Myrtle an' Mis' Evans raisin' each other to the limit, an' Preacher had 'em cold decked from the start."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AUGUST the Spinner, robed in floating, purple hazes, her distaff wound with silver cobwebs, had journeyed up the mountain sides to meet her sister, September, on the summits—September, the painter, with her crown of scarlet and gold leaves and her palette set with brilliant colours.

On the first day of the new queen's reign Frances had gone alone to Garvin's library, and now stood in the handsome, spacious, rather austere room, aimlessly drawing books from the shelves, turning the pages, scanning them with unseeing eyes and putting them back again. For the last week she had suffered a feeling of depression, slight at first, but deepening day by day, until it became an obsessing unrest and longing for which she could find no name; but which "kindled by night and subdued her" until, this first day of September, she felt disconsolate, almost to tears.

Ever since the day when she had started to follow Ethel and old Andrew Campbell up the road, she had known this reaction of feeling, and she was peculiarly unable to cope with it, inasmuch as she had never been a woman of moods. Her poise was the habit of years, won by the choice of an occupation which imposed on her a constant self-control. So long had she invited others to come and lean on her that their weakness,

THE NEW MISSIONER

drawing on her strength, had so augmented her calm security of self that she entirely forgot the tiger of temperament chained in the deeps of her nature. But now it lifted its head and stirred in sleep.

We speak always in extremes—pain, pleasure; light, darkness; joy, sorrow. These are stimulants and goads. When pain grips us we rise to the conflict and struggle to find relief. We spring to welcome joy; but there is a state of feeling, or more fitly, a lack of feeling where both pain and pleasure are lost from our consciousness. Perhaps without warning or premonition, the dish of life is suddenly without salt or savour; the vibrating light and colour of the universe is washed out to one grey, colourless monotone, the dull day merges into a black, stifling night without a star, without one breeze of freshness.

When we suffer, we strive to find words to express our anguish. "I am a companion to owls and a brother to dragons"; but the groper in the grey world mutters with Job: "A land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness."

The days of the outer world were still as gold and purple as those in which Frances had rejoiced; but she could no longer enter the heart of their splendour and warm her hands at the inner glow. The bloom was off the summer; no longer the maternal arms of her mother, Earth, enfolded her. In her effort to throw off this deadening apathy, she would read and reread the books she had loved; but they were without meaning; or she

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

would walk miles in her futile attempts to recapture the mood of yesterday, to feel again her nearness to Nature and rid herself of this body of death—the sense of isolation from all natural sights and sounds.

But even in the pine forests, those leagues of scented gloom, where whispers and intimations of unfathomable mysteries had reached her, she knew no mitigation of her weary *ennui*. Sometimes the wind in the pine tops was like the distant booming of cathedral bells, and again like the solemn surges of the sea; but it could not call back her spirit from the wastes of desolation. She was numb almost to deadness.

It was in this mood that she stood in the library, idly fingering the books, and remaining entirely uninterested in their contents. There is repose and serenity in the very atmosphere of a library; but Frances was too half-hearted and recent a student to accept that balm, that divine solace with which great books heal their lovers. A feeling of profound loneliness swept over her. What was the matter? she asked herself. Why, why, had this wonderful revelation come to her in these mountains, this lifting of the veil which showed to her eager vision her new worlds and worlds? And then, just as she had begun to live in their courts and palaces, the curtain had fallen and she was thrust into the isolation of the “world without any order.”

A wave of self-pity foreign to her nature broke over her, and the unusual tears smarted in her eyes. She dropped her face in her hands and then lifted it quickly as the handle of the door turned, the curtain was thrust

THE NEW MISSIONER

aside and Garvin stood on the threshold. Frances's heart gave one quick throb, and although she stood perfectly still, she began to tremble violently from head to foot, gazing straight at him with wide, doubting eyes, in the depths of which a light slowly dawned.

He remained for a moment in the doorway peering into the room, and evidently accustoming his eyes to the somewhat shadowy light. "Ah!" He drew a deep breath of satisfaction. "They told me you were here, but I couldn't see you at first. It seems too good to be true."

"I—I—" she faltered, "didn't expect you," still gazing at him half-unbelievingly.

"Didn't you?" He had walked down the room toward her, and now he gently and still smilingly took from her the book which she had involuntarily clasped against her breast; the hands he thus released he caught tightly and warmly in his.

"I'm so glad!" he said deeply. "Missioner, do you know how glad? I've dreamed of finding you here, but I never thought I really would. Why, do you know, I was so childishly anxious that you should be the first person I should speak to, that I pretended not to see the boys as I drove up from the station."

In spite of her flushing confusion, Frances could not fail to notice a great change in him. He was a different man from the Garvin of the lagging step and the perplexed eyes she had previously known. This Garvin was younger; the old dejection and weariness had vanished, the stoop had gone from his shoulders, the fur-

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

rows from his brow. The sad lines about his mouth were effaced.

"I am so glad," he said, speaking again, "that you have made use of my books. Have you enjoyed them?"

"Enjoyed them!" He did not appear to remember that he still held her hands, and now she drew them away, catching at the topic he suggested, to cover her embarrassment. "Your books have opened a new world to me." She spoke eagerly, happily, entirely forgetful of the fact that a few moments before she had been a companionless wanderer in the grey world. "Suppose you had suddenly found a new star, full of all the most wonderful things you had ever dreamed of."

"So through my books a new planet has swum into your ken?" he murmured, plainly delighted; but as he continued to gaze at her, he quickly forgot her words. There was no one in all the world like her. She was the most individual creature he had ever known. He liked the severe straight lines of that nun-like black gown, the stiff white collar, and the white cuffs turned back over the sleeves. He liked that shining blue-black hair brushed smoothly back from her brow, and the great plaits wound around the back of her head. He liked best of all that almost ascetic reserve of expression in a face which could sparkle and break and quiver and grow vivid with feeling. He could fancy the glow of carnation on that smooth, pale cheek—there was a catch at his heart at the thought.

And if she had noted a change in him, he was equally

THE NEW MISSIONER

quick to read an alteration in her. She seemed irradiated by some soft inner happiness—it dated since his coming, had he but known it. There was a light in the dark depths of her eyes, and her mouth showed a tremulous and almost constant tendency to break into those sweet and curving smiles of which he had hitherto caught but rare and fleeting glimpses; but the smiles held something now of a hidden gaiety and even mischief, which charmed while it continued to puzzle him.

“You really have grown rested,” he said at last, with a long breath of satisfaction. “I can tell that by your looks.”

“You, too,” she responded happily. “And Angel? How is she? Where is she?”

“Oh, Angel!” he laughed heartily. “It would fill a book to tell you of Angel’s performances. And such a company as we were. I got a nurse for her in Denver, intending to send Wang and Lee back; but Angel wouldn’t hear of it, and really, before we got far, I found that I needed them all. The moment that we reached the door here, she scampered off to find Herries and inquire for her beasts. I was so thankful that we didn’t have to travel with a whole menagerie that I didn’t mind our retinue of servants; and think of it! the only additions to our household are a frightened, chattering monkey and another screaming, swearing parrot!”

Frances laughed. “Mr. Herries will be delighted to see her back; he has been really lonely without her.”

“There is a curious sympathy between them; both

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

oddities," he smiled. "Well, how is everything in the village? Anybody struck a bonanza?"

"No," she shook her head. "No one except myself, and I have in these books."

This time his smile was so tender, so comprehending that she flushed slightly under its caress.

"I saw Mrs. O'Brien standing in that loud garden of hers looking out at the mountains as if she hated them. She was standing just so when I left. Has she never moved since?"

Frances welcomed this change of subject. "She does hate them, I believe. She complains that they shut her in. I cannot understand that. They have meant the 'freer step, the fuller breath, the wide horizon's grander view' to me."

"To you, yes." He spoke meditatively and looked beyond her as if, for the moment, he forgot her presence. "But the Pearl is different. She always was an odd, capricious creature. I never understood her, and I don't believe anyone else ever did. I don't believe she understands herself." He pondered this a moment. "I met Dan Mayhew down in Denver, and he told me that Bob Flick is here. I'm sorry. Bob's been devoted to the Pearl for years, and O'Brien's an impulsive, mad sort of a fellow."

He glanced down at Frances and noticed, to his surprise and slight chill, that her expression had changed. It was as if she had mentally withdrawn from him. Her mouth had set in rather severe lines and her brow was grave.

THE NEW MISSIONER

"I must go," she said, half turning from him and drawing on her gloves.

"But why?" he strove to stay her, and then seeing that her determination held, caught at another plea. "You are going to take some books with you, are you not?" Seeing her hesitate. "Of course you are, and you are going to let me carry them for you."

"No," a little shyly. "I am sure you have a great many things to look after; and I must stop a minute at Mrs. Evans's."

"Oh, no! Not this morning; not the first morning I have come back. Here, let me select some books for you." He fumbled over the shelves. "You see, I want to make the most of my time. I have so many things to talk over with you, and after the next fortnight, I will be more or less occupied for a week or so. There are some Eastern and English men coming up to investigate some properties here, and I have asked them to be my guests."

"Ah, yes. Are there many in the party?"

"Five or six. Brown, Edgerton, Watrous, Sourrier,—an Englishman,—and his daughter, a beautiful creature, Miss Evelyn Sourrier, Diana, as we called her on our recent trip. She's a mighty huntress."

"Ah, yes." Frances's voice sounded strangely flat and toneless in her own ears.

"I think you will like her; I am sure of it."

She drew back a little. "I thank you; but please don't ask me to meet your guests or to take part in any entertainment you may arrange for them. I couldn't.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I know nothing of social life or observances. Please, please, remember that I am only a Missionary, that I have been for years a slum Missionary."

"Nonsense!" He spoke strongly; and then seeing her evident discomfort, smiled. "Nonsense! I'm afraid you've grown morbid, and no wonder, shut up in this God-forsaken village with all these freaks. Come out into the sunshine, Missioner—Missioner," lingering tenderly on the word.

With a lifting of the heart, she obeyed him, and out into the glory of the golden day they stepped together. The hillsides lay in smiling repose; the bloom was on the earth again. Frances remembered the open sesame which admitted her to the splendid worlds. Her lips trembled with smiles, her voice rippled with laughter.

Garvin was full of humorous anecdote concerning Angel and his recent journey, and so quickly did the time fly that they seemed scarcely to have started across the flats before they turned into Sunshine Avenue. There, their attention was immediately and involuntarily arrested by a scene of unwonted activity in Mrs. Nitschkan's front yard, which was also absorbing the interest of the greater part of Zenith's feminine population, who hastily leaving the stove and the washtub and all that they might contain, leaned far over their front gates, determined to lose no whit of the proceedings before their eyes.

Before the gipsy's door and amid the tin cans and broken crockery which adorned her lawn stood two shaggy burros, answering respectively to the names of

THE NEW MISSIONER

Jemmy and Jerry, and with the sad and patient stoicism of their kind, allowed themselves to be laden with burdens heavy and grievous to be borne.

With a skill betokening long experience Mrs. Nitschkan herself was busily occupied in adjusting various cumbersome objects upon the backs fitted to bear them.

Hard upon her heels were the children, who, as she arranged her camping outfit, were fetching and carrying with a zeal and alacrity which suggested that they expected immediately to enjoy the rewards of service.

"Here, Captola," ordered the gipsy cheerily, "you and Josh had best strap that cookstove on the off side of Jerry, to balance the tent, an' you, Celia, can fetch Mommie her fishin' rods an' gun. I guess I'll load 'em on to Jemmy."

Gathered about the front gate, that was maintained upon its hinges by a frayed bit of rope, were gathered Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Thomas, and Mrs. Landvetter, and if attitude and expression may be taken as indications of inner emotions, these ladies were evidencing strong disapproval of their friend's activities.

As Frances and Garvin drew near, Mrs. Evans lifted up her voice to demand the purpose of these elaborate preparations: "What does all this mean, Mis' Nitschkan?" she asked in sharp, rasped tones.

"Jus' what you can see," replied her friend airily, arranging some blankets and provisions more securely on Jerry's back.

"Sadie Nitschkan!"—Mrs. Evans's voice was mag-



Before the gipsy's door stood two shaggy burros



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

isterial—"we want to know somethin' an' we want to know the truth. Are you goin' gipsyin' again?"

"I sure am." The answer was decisive, if indifferent.

"An' leave your husband and kids to shift for themselves an' in the care of the entire camp—which means us—while you go traipsin' over the hills like a wild woman?" Mrs. Evans's shrill tones rang a crescendo of incredulous, indignant remonstrance.

Mrs. Nitschkan paused a moment in her packing, to stand with arms akimbo, measuring in humorous, faintly sardonic contemplation, the group at the gate.

"Gosh a'mighty! What are you gettin' so hot for, Evans? Jack's up at the prospect doin' assessment work for a while, an' if a lot of half-grown kids can't look after theirselves an' keep the roof over their heads, I don't know when they're goin' to learn. You girls kind o' keep an eye on 'em an' they'll be all right. Come on, Bob, we might as well be movin'."

"She's a-takin' Bob, the only one that's got any idea of behavin'," groaned Mrs. Thomas. "But if they get sick, Mis' Nitschkan," she pleaded desperately, "an' you know that all flesh is grass enough to do that now an' then, why, where air we, an' where air you?"

"How kin I tell?" answered the Amazon happily, leading Jerry carefully through the gate, while her lad followed her with Jemmy. "But," emphatically, "they ain't goin' to get sick. These kids is tough as whipcord. Here you," turning to the children with a last admonition, "now you take care of things an' do right,

THE NEW MISSIONER

an' we'll bring you somethin' nice; but if you don't, it's a lickin' apiece. So long, girls."

The women turned to each other with lacklustre eyes and elongated faces.

"Well, we certainly got our work cut out for us," sighed Mrs. Thomas, with the finality of despair, as they watched their sturdy friend starting afoot and light-hearted in her quest of the open road, leading one reluctant burro herself, while her equally sturdy boy tugged at the rope of its companion, their faces set toward the black, mysterious pines at the foot of the shining peaks.

"What'd happen to us poor women if we'd shirk our responsibilities like what she does?" cried Mrs. Thomas, settling her sunbonnet with impatient hands. "An' yet she gets along as good as the rest of us. I never go to Denver for a day, but what I come home to find my kids in bed with a ketchin' disease, or with some of their legs an' arms broke."

"I'll bet there ain't a bakin' of bread in the house," snapped Mrs. Evans.

"Nor a stick of vood in de shed," ruminated Mrs. Landvetter gloomily. "Now you know how long our vood piles is goin' to last."

But their annoyance was far from communicating itself to the four deserted children. They danced gaily about, singing with clear, shrill voices: "Mommie's gone a-gipsyin'! Mommie's gone a-gipsyin'!" in a very ecstasy of freedom. Loosed of moral band and tether, they realised to the full that the world was theirs for

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

purposes of experimentation; but their joy was not shared by their mother's friends. On the contrary, the expression of it seemed to plunge the three ladies into still deeper gloom, and it was not until they had slightly recovered from the blow of the gipsy's departure, and were sadly turning homeward, that the significance of the two figures strolling up the hill toward Frances's cabin, struck them.

"My patience!" cried Mrs. Thomas excitedly. "Did you see that? Walt Garvin's back, an' walkin' with Missioner, the first thing!"

Mrs. Evans gazed at her with exasperation; her protective instincts were always aroused where Frances was concerned. "Well, she ain't a-walkin' an' talkin' to him your way, Marthy Thomas. She's in a hand-to-hand grapple with the devil for his soul."

"Huh!" Mrs. Thomas scoffed unbelievably. "That's a old man-trick. If they can't get around you no other way, they begin beggin' you to save their souls."

"Before you take to criticisin' others," returned Mrs. Evans icily, "you better be lookin' to your own behaviour. You ain't yet explained about Dan Mayhew."

Mrs. Thomas twisted her shoulders impatiently. "I ain't made up my mind," she muttered sullenly. "They's others; an' I told you once, it's more fun bein' a widow than I thought."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE days that followed Garvin's return remained in Frances's memory like a cloud of rainbow-hued bubbles blown into an atmosphere of strained honey. She was environed, encompassed, enfolded by sympathy and understanding; and in addition, she had the constant intellectual stimulation of a mind infinitely more comprehensive and cultivated than her own. This delightful companionship revealed not only Garvin to her, but herself to herself.

No matter what the demands of his affairs, and they were many, there was not a day when he and she did not read or walk together. Sometimes these strolls led them to the sunlit, open flats, where the butterflies drifted and the wind and sun beat upon their faces; and again, they wandered in the dim seclusion of the forest.

One afternoon they had climbed far up to the roofs of the world. Frances had never been so high. Below her lay the vast, sunflooded sea of atmosphere, the ranges lifting their peaks above it, as islands from the sea. For a moment she felt a sense of panic, a horror of the immensity before her, and almost yielded to the impulse to fling herself flat upon the bare mountain side, and hide from her eyes this terrifying glimpse of infinity; but this was quickly succeeded by a sweep of exhilaration, an impelling desire to lift herself on her

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

toes and spread her arms and fly—fly out into the vast blueness before her. She thought of Garvin with a great heart-throb of admiration. She was here on this mountain top with one of the lords of life. Her mind reverted to Campbell, and his profound belief in the unseen kingdom. Then she turned quickly from the thought. Beside her was one of the real conquerors. Had he not struggled mightily with the mountains and subdued them—these stern and savage mountains which brooded always over their hidden treasures? Could he not go into the marts of the world and buy, buy, buy, and yet leave his great, golden hoard almost untouched?

So long was she silent that Garvin leaned forward to interrupt her reverie; but the wind blew the words from his mouth in an opposite direction. He laughed and looked at her. The same wind had blown the great coils of her hair down, and tossed it about her like a storm cloud. In its shadow he saw a flush rise upon her cheek, that carnation, the very thought of which had made his heart throb. For a moment, or an eternity, they gazed into each other's eyes; and then she caught her hair and busied herself in an embarrassed and futile attempt to wind it about her head; but the wind still baffled her efforts, and Garvin's eyes were still upon her, so she took refuge in a flight as hasty as she could make it, down the hill.

Among the trees she achieved something like an arrangement of her hair and became herself again, if anything, a thought more sedate and reserved than before. Down low on the mountain the air was mild, there

THE NEW MISSIONER

was a soft languor in the touch of the wind on one's cheek; the earth lay in a sort of dreaming brightness, and the hillsides were like vast, changing mosaics of colour, inwrought, overlaid, inlaid with the gold of the aspens, the crimson and flame of the maples, the green gloom of the pines; and from farther purple mountains rose the white peaks, sharply, coldly distinct against the deep, bending blue of the sky.

There are certain temperaments so susceptible to colour that it acts upon them as an intoxicant, and Frances was one of these. "Oh, the glory of it! The wonder of it!" she whispered. Then as if seeking relief from the unbearable splendour, she turned her gaze down toward the village basking lazily in the afternoon sun.

"I wish things looked more tidy down there." She sought refuge in the commonplace.

"Yes," agreed Garvin. "By the way," diffidently, "I noticed last Sunday that the church is pretty shabby. Do you think they would let a sinner like me have it painted?"

She clasped her hands impulsively and looked at him with grateful, delighted eyes. "Oh, if you only would! You say that the church needs painting. Well, I noticed that you were there last Sunday and the Sunday before, and I—I am glad."

He twisted his mouth into a queer little smile as he looked at the sun-drenched ranges: "M—m—yes," he said drily, "I'll always be there when you're going to preach. I can't promise as much to Carrothers."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"Oh, I can't preach!" She was really abashed now, the colour tinged her cheek and she drew back and spoke deprecatingly. "I sometimes talk a little, just of the things that come to me to say," she explained eagerly.

"That's it!" He turned his gaze from the mountains to look directly at her and nod emphatically: "That's the reason we come to hear you, because you speak from the heart. Your great, big heart," he added, but it was under his breath.

"But I can't preach," still explaining. "I wouldn't know how to put a real sermon together. The only way I can talk at all is that somebody comes to me in trouble and I get to studying how I can help them. And then I pray, pray, pray for a message for them and for all who suffer. Oh, Mr. Garvin!" clasping her hands on her heart, the mystical light coming into her eyes, "our troubles all seem different, but really they are all the same—and a message for one, is a message for all. And after I pray, I wait, and the message always comes, and I just get up in that little, tumble-down church and tell about it; but I couldn't preach to save my life. I often wish I could give you a real sermon," wistfully.

He looked at her with wonder, even a curious speculative awe. "That is why we come," he said. "If you gave us a real sermon, I guess none of us would be there. We've heard too many of them," with a short laugh. "It is you we wish to hear."

"Oh, no!" with a deepening of the eyes, a strange incredulous smile, as if she spoke from some secret con-

THE NEW MISSIONER

viction. "It isn't me! It's the Word that's drawing you."

"Maybe it is," he answered, influenced for the moment by her belief. "Maybe," he sighed, and then smiled in amused scorn of himself. "Well, well, let it go at that. Then you think I'll be allowed to paint the church?"

"Indeed, yes," gratefully. "Oh, look at the shadows on the hills, Mr. Garvin, you can see them move."

He nodded assent, then he smiled. "Well, I took you to a high mountain this afternoon, even if I didn't show you the kingdoms of the world."

"Perhaps you did." Her voice was low, her face was turned away from him. She shivered slightly.

"You are cold." His tones held a tender solicitude, so tender, that it frightened her.

"It is getting chilly," she cried nervously. "It is growing late. I showed you the shadows on the hills, long ago. Hurry, we must get home!"

And not only were there afternoons and mornings when they loitered up the trails; but long evenings when the hunter's moon swung up above the black mass of the hills like a great, silver flower, and by its light Frances would watch Garvin's tall figure hasten up the road with eager feet. Then they would sit in her cabin, the wood fire crackling in her little stove, and talk over the books they were reading together; and of life, always less of books and more of life, and finally more and more of themselves and of their personal experiences, and the colour and impulse these had given to

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

existence. And under the steady light of Garvin's sympathy and understanding, Frances opened, petal by petal, in the joy of self-revelation, drawing from some inner, and often unsuspected sanctuary, her inmost thoughts and feelings.

But not always did they sit alone. Mr. Herries was often a sardonic third, Ethel and Mr. Campbell came frequently, as did Carrothers; and Mrs. Landvetter, Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Thomas were wont to climb the hill almost daily to discuss Mrs. Nitschkan's reprehensible conduct, and their growing irritation regarding it.

"Something's got to be done to bring Nitschkan back," affirmed Mrs. Evans, with her customary emphasis, one mild afternoon as the ladies sat sewing in the pleasant open space before Frances's cabin. "Yesterday my Rupert Hentzau come toddling home with his little face all painted blue on one side, an' red on the other; an' with house paint, too. He said he'd been playin' Injun with them Nitschkan brats."

"It might have et into the brain," said Mrs. Thomas, with the relish of one who loved to sup on horrors. "Gee! You ain't had it all, Mis' Evans. I've sewed buttons up an' down them Nitschkan backs until I'm dizzy. Captola come to my house yesterday without a button on her; jus' stuck as full of pins as a porcupine."

"My vood pile is 'most all gone," sighed Mrs. Landvetter, "und dey haf broke two of my vindow panes. Ven I catch dose devils I gif each of dem a dollar's vort of vippings."

"It's weeks since she left," said Mrs. Evans dispirit-

THE NEW MISSIONER

edly, "an' old man Johnson seen her a day or two ago, an' he says she's shot a bear an' was talkin' of pushin' on still further; never said a word about comin' home. She's somewhere up in the North Park now, an' there's no hope of gettin' her back before the snow flies."

The women involuntarily paused in their sewing to gaze out resentfully upon the September splendour of the narrow plateau and its enclosing mountains. The hills swam in purple hazes; the aspens fluttered their shimmering gold through the scarlet of the maples and the dark green of the pines. Begrudgingly, the group thought of Mrs. Nitschkan, enjoying to the full her wild freedom, rising from her bed on the earth to inhale great "draughts of space," alive to the tips of her fingers, fooling with dangers, and embracing rough discomforts for the robust love of them, instinct with the gay, fresh sentiment of the road, tossing the light coin of her jovial greetings to the passers-by.

It was a fleeting vision; but sufficient to arouse in each feminine breast the scorn of the housed and tended beast for the forager of the woods a scorn eternally mingled with an unsubdued and primitive envy.

Mrs. Landvetter broke the silence with a sharp click of her needles. "Vell, dere must be some vay of vork-in' it to get her back," hopefully.

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Evans, who had been unwontedly silent. "There's always a way out of everything, an' I thought of a way out of this; but it's got to be worked cautious."

"How vould it do to send vord to her dat Jack's

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

kind o' took mit some odder girl?" advanced Mrs. Landvetter. "Hein?"

"What'd she care?" Mrs. Thomas's tone was infinitely scornful. "She ain't like the rest of us self-sacrificing, submissive women, that wins a man through our weakness and dependence, an' then get ignored and neglected or worse, that is, if we don't look sharp an' ain't ready to hand 'em out as good as they give. Now, Mis' Nitschkan, she'll tramp off gipsyin' without sayin' by your leave to anybody. She'll do a day's work in the mines or shoot deer to beat any of 'em, win the boys' money from 'em night after night; an' what do they say, 'Oh, Mis' Nitschkan, she's a good feller!' Whereas, if 'twas us, they'd say: 'Disgustin'!' 'Disgraceful!' Why, even Dan Mayhew, he was holdin' forth last night like a fool man loves to, an' like any other fool woman, I was hangin' on his words like they was gospel."

"'A woman's place,' he says, loud and argumentative, 'is stayin' at home an' mindin' the house and kids.'"

"'What about Mis' Nitschkan?' I asked real mild an' innocent."

"'Oh, she's different,' he answers, 'an' she's all right, too, you bet.' My Lord! Sometimes I think there ain't no justice in the world."

"Oh, I've heard the same talk from Sile," affirmed Mrs. Evans. "The other night I says: 'Course, Mis' Nitschkan's one of my best friends, but she certainly is a figure of fun in them man's clothes.'"

"'They suit her,' Sile answers. 'An' I guess they

THE NEW MISSIONER

suit Jack, too,' he says real spiteful. 'After he's married, a man ain't hankerin' to see so much ribbon an' lace fixin's when he knows he's got to pay for 'em no matter how the ore's runnin'.'"

"Ain't they the low dogs now!" murmured Mrs. Thomas. "How'd ever us poor women get even with 'em, if we didn't have a skillet or a pan handy now an' then?"

"Well, every one of our kids is gettin' demoralised by those Nitschkan Injuns, an' what we got to do is to get her here, an' get her to stay; an' us girls got to manage it." Mrs. Evans's tone was final.

Apparently the manner in which the delicate and difficult matter was to be managed was speedily decided upon, and a definite plan for campaign mapped out, for a few evenings later as the dusk was falling, the little band of women knocked at the kitchen door of the Nitschkan cabin.

"Come in," said a gruff voice, and they entered to find Mr. Nitschkan, heavy and bearded, sitting alone. His chair was tilted back against the rough log walls; his pipe was in his mouth and he was, to outward seeming, absorbed in meditations from which he had no desire to be aroused.

A hastily cleared table, whereon a smoky lamp was dimly burning, indicated that Celia and Captola had swiftly disposed of the supper things after a cursory method known as a lick and a promise, and, as their shouts without betokened, had joined the boys.

The ladies greeted Mr. Nitschkan pleasantly; but without changing his position, he viewed them with a

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

glance of apprehensive suspicion from under his lowered eyelids, merely growling a responsive "How do," without removing his pipe from his mouth.

It suited his visitors, however, to ignore his lack of cordiality and the unrelenting hostility of his glance.

"Well, Jack," said Mrs. Thomas, with an ingratiating smile, "us girls got to thinkin' you'd be feelin' kind o' lonesome with Mis' Nitschkan gone so long, so we thought it would be real neighbourly to look in on you, without waitin' for an invitation." She laughed softly at her joke, as she threw aside her cape.

"Yes," added Mrs. Evans genially. "Yes, indeed, an' knowin' Celia an' Captola was young an' inexperienced, we brought a little somep'n along to help you out in your lunch pail. Mis' Landvetter, jus' kindly lay the things out on the table."

Mrs. Landvetter began to unpack a large basket and spread the various articles it contained in a delectable array, tabulating them as she proceeded. "Two of Mis' Thomas's best cakes, gold und silver, und chocolate. You see, Marthy remembered your taste, Jack; und a half dozen of Mis' Effens's saucer pies, all kinds; und six of mein meat turn-ofers, und plummy duff, und a loaf of salt risin', und a loaf of plain bread."

A look of pleased anticipation dispelled the gloom of Mr. Nitschkan's face. The suspicion vanished from his eyes. He brought his chair to its legs with a thud, removed his pipe and cheerfully knocked out its ashes on the edge of the stove.

THE NEW MISSIONER

"That certain is neighbourly," he said, his glance fixed appreciatively upon the varied and appetising exhibit upon the table. "I wouldn't hardly have expected it of you;" again distrust wavered in his eyes. "Here, Mis' Evans, that chair might give down, take this one. Celia an' Captola ain't no great shakes, I can tell you that," grumblingly.

"What do you hear from Mis' Nitschkan, Jack?" asked Mrs. Evans with casual interest, feeling that the moment had arrived when she might open the lead to which her trained lieutenants would tactfully play up.

"I don't hear nothin'," responded Mr. Nitschkan in a matter-of-fact tone, feeling in his coat pocket for some loose tobacco, and prodding it into the bowl of his pipe with his thumb.

"My, Jack! The backs of your hands is all split!" cried Mrs. Thomas with sudden solicitude.

"I know it;" he looked at them ruefully; "but I couldn't find a thing in this house to rub 'em with."

"My patience! an' me with a box of Rocky Mountain salve in my pocket!" exclaimed the tiny Mrs. Evans, lifting her trim calico skirt, and drawing a tin box from a huge pocket in her stuff petticoat. "Here, let me rub some on. A man certain does need a woman to look after him. Has Sadie sent any word when she'll be back?"

"Sadie? Oh, she'll come when she gets ready," he replied with philosophic indifference.

Mrs. Evans elevated her eyebrows and shook her head two or three times. "Well, course we think the world an'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

all of Sadie, Jack ; but jus' between ourselves, this ain't no way to act. This camp ain't what it was ten years ago. Folks is got to act more formal every day, an' when a wife leaves her man for months at a time an' goes traipsin' over the mountains, they will talk."

Nitschkan was conscious of a dull perplexity, a growing distrust of his own customary and hitherto unquestioned standards. "Oh, that's all right," he answered with a bluff assumption of ease. "Sadie, she's kind o' different. She can't be penned up all year in four walls ; she's got to get out an' get a breath of air, or she'd give right out ;" he was repeating a formula long impressed upon his mind.

"I do' know if it's all right," Mrs. Thomas was gravely questioning. "Maybe a home-keepin' body like me's all wrong ; but how Sadie Nitschkan kin go off a-gipsyin' leavin' you here all alone with those dev— wild kids to look after, is more'n I kin understand. The house is goin' to wrack an' ruin ; nothin' to eat 'cept'n what two half-grown girls cooks fer you, an' your poor hands all bust open to the bone on the backs of 'em. How kin she do it?" There was the moisture of tears in Mrs. Thomas's blue eyes.

There was a moment's silence while Mr. Nitschkan, holding his pipe with loose fingers, abstractedly rubbed the bowl of it in the palm of his other hand. His head was bent upon his chest, and his ruminative gaze was fixed upon a knothole in the floor, with the resentful expression of one who has suddenly discovered a grievance.

THE NEW MISSIONER

"Vell, vell, vell! Ve didn't come here to make you feel bad," cried Mrs. Landvetter cheerily, laying aside her knitting. "Now it aind't sociable to sit here all de efen'ing mitout a drop of anything. Here, girls, you get busy. Git dat jar of cream out of de basket, Mis' Thomas, und you, Effens, you vas a master hand at makin' de coffee. Now, Jack," bustling about, "vich vill you haf—a slice of pie or a piece of cake?"

"Oh, give him both," exclaimed Mrs. Thomas, with unctuous generosity. "Here," cutting a huge piece first of the cake and then of the pie, "here, I'll put your plate down, an' Mis' Evans 'll pour your coffee. Now, sit right up to the table," patting his shoulder with a maternal and protecting hand.

Mr. Nitschkan, with something of the sensation of the Porter of Bagdad when he awoke to find himself in the palace of the Princess of China, now completely threw off the surly suspicion of the early evening, and allowed himself to expand in this grateful and comforting atmosphere of feminine consideration and sympathy.

"My Lord! It does a man good to get his teeth in vittles like these," he said, when he had finished the last bite of pie and sat gazing with glistening eyes at the remaining half on the pie plate.

"Aw, take the rest, Jack," urged Mrs. Thomas. "It'll do you good. Like enough you ain't had much to stay you lately."

He took a deep draught of coffee and wiped his mouth meditatively on the back of his hand. Then an impulse of gallantry stirred within him, a desire to ex-

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

press his gratitude for the neighbourly offices of his wife's friends. "I hope Evans 'preciates his blessings."

Mrs. Landvetter rattled her knitting needles together and drew a deep, rasping breath which was almost a groan; Mrs. Evans tossed her head and lifted her eyebrows with the slight, scornful smile of the *femme incomprise*.

"He ain't like you, Jack," gently explained Mrs. Thomas, "with a heart as big as a bushel basket an' pleased to death with any little thing that's done fer you."

"That's so," affirmed Mr. Nitschkan emphatically, unable to withstand the heady wine of Mrs. Thomas's glance. "I always was that way—ready to 'preciate, and—well, jus' all heart; but," with a heavy sigh, "when a man's wife leaves him two or three months at a time with a lot of kids wild as Injuns hellin' around—what's he goin' to do?"

He sat with his head in his hand, stabbing the table with his knife. Not having hitherto regarded himself as an injured being, he was enjoying to the full the passion of self-pity into which his visitors' commiseration had swept him.

The ladies sighed in unison.

"Now, I'll tell you, Jack," Mrs. Evans felt that the moment had come for forcing him to take action. "This ain't right fer Sadie, an' it ain't right fer the kids, an' it ain't right fer you."

"Praise Gawd, it ain't!" interrupted Mrs. Thomas fervently.

THE NEW MISSIONER

Mrs. Evans silenced her with a glance. "Now, Jack, you got to see what all the rest of us sees so plain,—that Sadie's got to be made to come back an' they's only one way to do it. Scare her good by pretendin' that you're terrible mad at her, an' that you ain't goin' to take her back at all, unless she comes home at once. Now, Dan Mayhew's goin' up to the Park to-morrow; an' he'll take a letter for you if you ask him to."

Mr. Nitschkan scratched his head. "What shall I say?" he murmured helplessly.

"Jus' say," continued his mentor, pursuing her advantage, "that you'll have no more to do with her; that she shan't come in the house nor see the kids nor anything, if she don't come the minute she gets that letter. Otherwise, she can spend the rest of her life gipsyin' if she's a mind to."

"If this dratted weather wouldn't hold out," fretted Mrs. Thomas. "Any other year, the snow would be flyin' before this time; but there ain't no justice in the world, even the weather's got to turn in an' accommodate Mis' Nitschkan. An' when she does come," with growing petulance, "she'll santer in sayin' she's had the time of her life, an' it's a pity us girls hadn't her taste for country life, then we wouldn't be gruntin' an' groanin' all the time—an' us wore to frazzles with her Injun kids! She's snapped her fingers good an' strong in your face, Jack Nitschkan, an' you bet, she'll probably go off for six months next year."

"Well, what kin I do?" growled Nitschkan in shame-faced irritation.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"You can be a man, that's what!" said Mrs. Evans with ringing significance, "an' you can let Sadie Nitschkan know that you're master in your own house. You can make it so hot for her that she'll give up any thought of gipsyin' for some years to come."

Nitschkan fidgetted uneasily. "Might as well talk sense," he muttered gruffly. "It ain't so easy to make it hot fer her."

Mrs. Evans arose and throwing her cape about her fastened it with impatient fingers. "Sadie Nitschkan has got to be disciplined," she said firmly. "Brace up, Jack, an' show some spirit an' we'll think of a way to help you manage it. Come, girls! So long, Jack!"

"So long, girls, an' thank ye. Here, I'll see you to the gate."

After gallantly assisting his visitors to pick their way through broken crockery and entangling wires, Mr. Nitschkan closed the gate thoughtfully behind them, called the children in, and peremptorily sent them to bed; and then sought diligently, and with final success among pots and pans for pen, ink and paper. Spreading these before him on the kitchen table, he sat, far into the night, with tongue in cheek and pen gripped tightly in his unaccustomed fingers, composing the letter which was to bring his wife to a sense of her neglected duties.

"I calkilate this'll fetch her in about a week, givin' Dan time to see her an' her time to get here," he said, when he had finished, viewing the work of his hand and brain with immense satisfaction.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IT was undoubtedly a blessing that in the present dejected and excited state of Mrs. Nitschkan's intimate friends their minds were taken from the subject of their grievance by the arrival of Garvin's visitors. Sleek, stout capitalists were common enough—they came and went every few weeks; but the presence of Miss Evelyn Alexandra Sourrier caused a tremendous commotion. This tall, fair, pretty girl with her classic repose, her smart outdoor costumes, her faultless grooming and her ease and charm of manner was something new in the experience of Zenith.

There was a noticeable slackening in household activities, and a marked increase in lengthy discussions held over side fences or front gates; and the ladies of Zenith found plenty to discuss. Each day there was a fresh expedition from the house on the flats, and each night from the open windows the sound of voices and laughter and music. The piano would be touched by light, skilful fingers, and a pure, sweet, soprano voice, not particularly strong, but charmingly cultivated, would float out to the listeners on the edge of the village.

By day there would be the rattle of traps, the stamp of horses' hoofs, for the English girl rode and drove with equal grace and assurance. Into many of these

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

excursions Garvin strove at first to draw Frances; but when he saw that her real inclination was against it, he desisted, and the gaiety, the action, the colour of the life that was being lived on the flats flowed by her like a stream in which she had no part.

At first Frances calmly busied herself in picking up the various threads of her rather neglected duties, neglected in thought if not actually in deed, happy in the remembrance of the golden hours since Garvin's return; but as the days dragged into a week and she learned that his guests had so enjoyed their visit that they had consented to prolong it for a few days at least, the desolate, almost violent emptiness of her life frightened her. It was as if she had suddenly been plunged into some deep, almost unsuspected abyss, deprived of all she valued. She had also become vaguely conscious of all the furtive eyes that were so eagerly bent upon her, for intuitively and unerringly she knew that Zenith was spending a large part of its time wondering how she "took" Garvin's constant attendance on Miss Sourrier, and speculating as to "how things stood between Missioner and Walt."

It was after a night the greater part of which had been spent in these reflections, that Frances awoke very early one morning, awoke to count the days that Garvin had spent almost constantly in the society of Evelyn Sourrier.

There was a sore feeling of disappointment and resentment at her heart, an emotion which she knew to be unreasonable, but which remained to torment her in

THE NEW MISSIONER

spite of her efforts to overcome it. In some way, she felt as if the tender, beautiful shoot of friendship between Walter Garvin and herself had been cut and that it bled—it bled within her heart. The room was still dark, although a pale, cold glimmer of dawn was beginning faintly to penetrate it. Frances lay upon her narrow bed gazing into the shadows, and as she thus lay, with wide eyes, Garvin's face grew slowly out of the gloom; that lined face, strong, sensitive, humorous, the tall figure with the slight droop to the shoulders. So, for a moment, vividly she saw him; behind him the shadows, between them the growing light of dawn. For a moment only he stood there smiling at her, and then—merely the shadows.

Frances never knew afterward whether it were a vision or some trick of her imagination, overwrought from a sleepless night; but in the second's space that he stood smiling at her, she awoke to a definite and full self-knowledge, and in that flash of revelation she saw herself as a silent plant, carefully, steadily putting forth its leaves, painstakingly growing a few inches, and fancying, in some half-sentient fashion, that it had achieved its purpose in existing; but now, through every branch, and leaf, and tendril, there swept, from some unfathomable, unsuspected depths of being, the tingling impulse of life, the tremulous certainty that the plant was to bear a blossom, an exotic and splendid late flowering. Ah, it was no tender shoot of friendship that Evelyn had bruised, it was the blossom of love!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

This full understanding of what her emotions during the past weeks had meant was to her like a blinding flash of light. It was a shock so violent as to affect her physically. She sat up in bed and gazed about her with wild, frightened eyes. Mechanically she caught up the heavy mass of hair lying along her back and twisted it about her head with trembling fingers. Then letting it fall again, she sprang from her couch and ran to the window.

The pale light was growing, the first flush of rose trembled over the high peaks, the silver pines across the road swayed in the morning wind, and while Frances clung to the window, the rising sun sent one straight, flashing beam through the trees. Almost, she heard the high command of eternal morning: "Lift up your gates and sing!"

The breeze swept down from the silver pines and through her window. She drew in its imperishable freshness in one long breath that thrilled and vivified every nerve. Ah, her gates were lifted as high as heaven and the very soul of her sang! She abandoned herself to the exaltation, the ecstasy of those moments of entire self-knowledge. A sea of tenderness flowed from her heart, and she stretched out her arms to the spot where Garvin's figure had grown from the dusk.

She did not take up the thread of her various duties that morning, and her household affairs, to which she usually gave a dainty and fastidious attention, were, for the first time, neglected. She sat, for the most part, with folded hands, dreaming. Through knowing her

THE NEW MISSIONER

own heart, she divined Garvin's; and in a belief of his love for her she basked in the golden content of the earth, basking in the autumn sun.

Her heart had at last demanded its toll. The primitive, elemental woman in her stirred in sleep, arose in grave clothes, bound, and confronting her, cried:

"Starved, atrophied, I yet demand my reckoning, my tithe of love, my joy of giving! This is my hour!" And listening to that voice, there stole over the Missionary a distaste for her work. Life, the commonplace, ordinary life of woman, suddenly flashed upon her the jewel facets of a thousand new meanings. Her splendid worlds were as dead planets; even that far, transcendent country to which Mr. Campbell sometimes journeyed, and for which the soul of her yearned, became dim and undesirable.

She wanted the dear world of everyday; the warm, snug fireside of content, with its homely, happy duties of service. She dreamed of the soft, moist kisses of children on her cheek, their vague clutching hands at her bosom; of a man's arms enfolding her and of his kisses on her mouth. To live in his hopes, to help build his future—that was a woman's only life.

During the afternoon Myrtle Swanstrom—since a fortnight past, Myrtle McGuire—climbed the trail and knocked at the cabin door. So deliciously conscious was Myrtle of the importance of her new position that she exhibited it by various outward and visible signs: such as discarding her pink sunbonnet and wearing her Sunday hat, as a sort of matronly distinction.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"My, but it's warm!" she exclaimed as she seated herself carefully in a rocking chair, forbearing to take her accustomed seat on the step, this, too, as a concession to matronly dignity. After due respect had been paid the conventionalities, by inquiries concerning Frances's welfare, she skilfully turned the conversation into those channels wherein the fluid thought of Zenith was at present running.

"My! Did you ever see such goin's on as they're havin' over to Walt Garvin's? Why, they say there's the greatest load of provisions sent up from Denver every day; fruit and vegetables an' all kinds of delicacies that ever was. An' all those horses! Well, Walt can certainly afford it. Why, Missioner, Walt's gettin' richer 'n' richer every minute. They say that in a year or so, when his mines is more developed, he'll be one of the richest men in the whole country. Frank says he's thinkin' now about goin' into politics. Well, it didn't take long to forget poor Lutie, did it? Though 'course nobody expects a man to mourn like a woman, it ain't in 'em. Do you think the English girl's pretty?"

"Very," replied Frances briefly.

"Kind o' tall," belittled Myrtle; "but she's real nice. Folks expected her to be terrible proud, but she ain't; not a mite. 'Course she talks so low an' fast an' kind o' foreign that you can't hardly understand her; but she ain't so bad.

"Say, Missioner, Frank an' me wants you to come down some evening real soon an' take supper with us. I mos' got the house in order, an' it's awful cute. An',

THE NEW MISSIONER

Missioner, Frank an' me's as happy as the day's long. When I think how crazy I acted—my! But then, girls ain't got any sense. It takes bein' married to settle 'em. An', Missioner,"—with real affection and loyalty,—"I ain't forgot how you tried to keep me straight an' make me see my duty. You don't know what it means to the women in this camp to feel that they's one woman they can come to an' kind o' talk things over with. Frank an' me owes a lot of our happiness to you, an'—oh, Missioner,"—with a long sigh,—"*I am so happy!*"

"Myrtle, I'm so glad." Frances spoke with heartfelt tenderness, and eternal sisterhood expressed itself in the smile that passed between them.

Myrtle suddenly leaned forward and gazed excitedly through the door. "I thought that was her dress," she explained. "Say, Missioner, it's the Pearl goin' up the hill with Bob Flick. Ain't it awful the way she traipses round with him? I don't see," with the severity of the newly wed, "how married women can carry on like that. Ain't they got their own husbands?"

But both the Pearl and Bob Flick were not only indifferent to gossip, but oblivious of it. Where the Black Pearl beckoned, Flick walked. If there was danger in the path they trod, he cared as little as she. O'Brien was away all day at the mines. Flick dealt faro bank all night; but during the afternoons he often stood by Mrs. O'Brien's gate, although he never entered her house, and together they would stroll through

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

the village street and up the trails, entirely heedless of the eyes which peered curiously from every window and doorway.

This afternoon, after passing the Missionary's cabin, the two climbed upward for a time, following a narrow trail until they reached a huge, flat rock in the soft gloom of a row of encircling pine trees, whose tall, dark tops pointed upward like Gothic spires in the deep blue sky. Here they seated themselves, and Flick drew a large handkerchief of checkered silk from his pocket and slowly wiped his brow. Not being a discerning person, he had failed to notice that the Black Pearl's interest in him continued to be singularly desultory and impersonal. It was enough that she would meet and talk with him; but it was not possible for him to suspect that her conversations with him had become the gate by which she could escape the high, crowding mountains and wander again in the remote and shadowy wastes of the desert. That her manner toward him was of unchanged and careless indifference, and that her light coquetry was inherent and habitual, did not trouble him. She had always been that way since he had known her.

For a few moments they sat in silence, gazing down into the valley shimmering in sun-hazes below, silent for a time; the Pearl's mind busy, as usual, with the mirage of her fancy. Suddenly she drew her breath in sharply: "A person could breathe down there," she cried. "Say, wasn't that air good? It just seemed to put fresh life into you."

THE NEW MISSIONER

Flick looked at her curiously. "Pearl, where was you born an' raised?"

She glanced up quickly. "Oh, I do' know," evasively. "I been about a good deal, 'most everywhere; but it seems to me that I been lookin' fer it, Bob, forever; that somethin', I don't know what, that I always, always been a-dreamin' of an' longin' fer."

"I don't ketch what you're harpin' on," he said patiently. "I don't see how anybody could be more free than you was. 'Course, if you *would* go and get married——"

"I wasn't never free," she said passionately. "There ain't nothin' free that's hobbled, even if the hobble's round your heart an' don't show."

"The mountains do seem to kind o' hedge you in," said the man, adopting what he supposed to be her point of view, "an' it sure don't seem right fer you to be caged up here. You"—he looked at her half fearfully, and slightly moistened his lips—"I'm a-goin' down the trail in a few days; come on an' go with me."

She shook her head. "I can't go junketing round with you, Bob; you're a-forgettin' Shock."

"Oh, I ain't a-forgettin' Shock," he answered coolly. "If you go with me, Pearl, him an' me'll probably have it out sometime; but that ain't worryin' me none. Pearl, I ain't forgot the first time I saw you. It was in the back room at Chickasaw Pete's, an' you was a-shakin' dice with two or three of the boys, an' I joined the game. I never admired no one in my life



For a long time they sat in silence

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

like I admired you then, for I knew you wasn't shakin' 'em square; but you done it so slick that I couldn't tell how you managed it, an' you walked out in about twenty minutes with the best part of our money. You remember, Pearl?*

"Oh, I remember," the mysterious veil of reverie had fallen over her sulkily eyes.

"An' the next time I seen you, you was dancin'. You had them emeralds twisted around your neck. Have you forgot how to dance?"

"No, I ain't forgot." She stirred her feet restlessly. "Oh, I ain't forgot." There was a moment of silence. "Bob, I always could talk to you, some way. I wonder why? With the other boys it was laugh an' carry on; but I could always sit down and talk sober an' serious to you. You never made a fool of yourself about me."

The man's face had grown grey. He attempted to speak once or twice before the words came. At last he laughed, one brief, harsh note.

"Maybe I didn't, Pearl. They was enough of 'em makin' fools of themselves about you, God knows! An' I see right from the start that you didn't give a damn for any of 'em; but I was always a fool about you in my heart. They's always plenty of men to go crazy about you, Pearl; to lie, an' steal, an' to kill each other fer you, an' make damn fools of theirselves generally. There's a-plenty that likes to show off that a-way; but there's only two or three in all your life that'll ever really love you, an' one of 'em's me."

THE NEW MISSIONER

He turned to meet her faintly astonished, cynical gaze. "It's true; it's God's truth!" he said doggedly, again drawing the handkerchief from his pocket with a trembling hand and passing it over his brow and his ashen face. "Oh, I always wanted you! Yes, I'd a stole an' lied an' fought fer you, too. You drove me as stark, starin' crazy as the rest of 'em; but that weren't all. There was somethin' in you, Pearl, that kind o' made me dream, an' that stayed with me; an' it don't let me think much about myself. It's about you. An' now I feel it this a-way. You ain't jus' quite yourself. You're a-feelin' the need of a little change. See? Well, you come down the trail with me of a Thursday."

It was several minutes before she answered. "I couldn't, Bob," and she added gently: "You've kind o' surprised me. I didn't know you felt that way for me, an' I'm awful sorry, honest, I am; but I couldn't go."

"Maybe I ain't made it plain to you," he pleaded. "Maybe you didn't understand. I mean it this a-way," in laborious explanation. "I ain't tryin' to take you away fer myself. It's because I see you ain't happy that I'm a-askin' you to go. All I'm a-askin' is to look after you, an' see that you're comfortable. You kin think of me as a kind of human dog. You'll let me set around when it don't bother you none; an' when you get tired of me you kin kick Fido out, and it'll be back to the kennel fer his. That's all I'm a-askin', Pearl."

She drew in her breath and looked at him strangely,

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

with something new in her glance, something that he had never seen there before.

"God, Bob! But you're a good fellow!" she said in an awed voice. "I didn't suppose there was any of your kind on the earth; but you don't understand."

"I kin learn," he said humbly. "Try me an' see if I can't."

She smiled at him her heart-shattering, cynical smile. "I don't see how you're a-goin' to learn somethin' that I don't understand myself," she answered; "an' that's me. There's so many of a person," resentfully, "so terrible many of a person. There's a somethin' in me that's tired, somethin' that's played the game fer a thousand years an' knows there ain't nothin' in it; an' there's somethin' in me that's got to live, an' that somethin' says, 'Everything comes to you so easy, reach out an' enjoy it'; an' maybe that's the reason that it don't never seem of no account. 'Cause it always comes so easy."

The pine needles fell about them. New arrows of sunlight pierced the soft gloom, and for a time they sat in the silence of the hills, the Pearl's wistful eyes searching the past.

"You was a-talkin' about my jewels a while back, Bob," she began suddenly. "Well, the night before I was married I give 'em all to Father Gonzales. It was in that dark little chapel, with just a candle or so burnin' before the shrines; an' it was so still, an' smelled faint of incense. An' you kind o' felt things, things you hadn't never known. Well, I give him my

THE NEW MISSIONER

emeralds, an' I says: 'Make some poor souls happy with what you can get for these, Padre.' Then he handed out a line of talk that sounded mighty good to me. He says: 'This deed that you done, my daughter, redeems your soul. Live clean an' happy from now on,' he says, 'an' forget the past.' Oh, but his words felt warm to my heart! 'That's what I want, Padre,' I says; 'that's what I want.' I stripped the rings off my fingers, an' I piled 'em up in his hands; an' I cried, Bob. Lord, how the tears run down my face, an' I don't know when I'd ever cried before! Well, he took an' laid the rings on the altar, an' he said: 'These offerings an' your tears washes your soul white. Go in peace, my daughter, an' sin no more.' An' I believed him." There was despair in her voice. "But it was a lie, all a lie, jus' like everything else. I can't find no happiness. There's too many of me; an' yet, I know there's somethin', somethin' that I've missed, an' I don't know how nor where to find it. You all always laughed at me 'cause I didn't know how to tell it; I jus' called it bein' free."

Flick turned on her with sudden passion. "An' you won't never find it as long as you stay with Shock O'Brien. They tell me," he clinched his hands on his knees and the dark purple crept up slowly under his skin, "they tell me he ain't no scruples against knockin' you 'round as he feels like. I'd——"

She sprang to her feet, livid with fury. "They say, they say——" She broke into a torrent of oaths. "Yes, Bob Flick," growing calmer, "it's true. He's hit

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

me, an' he's hit me more'n once. But why? 'Cause he was jealous."

"I don't see what difference that makes," he muttered.

"You don't? I suppose not,"—with infinite scorn,—
"but any woman would. Why, he loves me so much that it drives him plumb off his head to see another man look at me. An' when he gets that way he ain't no idea what he does. An' he ain't never raised a bruise on me, not once, that he ain't cried like a baby an' broke his heart over it when he come to himself. Maybe you think, Bob Flick, 'cause I kind of like to talk over old times with you, that I'd go off with you an' leave him. Why, I'd see you dead in the ditch first. Maybe you think 'cause I kind of hate the mountains and the flat old life here that I'm tired of Shock. Well, you got another good long guess comin'."

She swept by him, drawing her skirts contemptuously from his shoe, and started down the trail. Then her mood changed, she turned and smiled cajolingly at him, and ran back to stretch out a conciliatory hand.

"Don't pay nò 'tention to me, Bob. You're one of the best ever, an' I know you mean kind, no matter how I take on. But, my Lord! I got to run. Shock'll be home, an' no supper fer him. So long."

She hastened down the hill, the cheap pink gown falling in long folds of beauty about her Diana-like grace, the last rays of the sun brightening her sun-burned hair—and never a thought for the man who sat motionless watching her.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE divine day through which Frances had dreamed proved to be only a weather-breeder, for the next day an early and unexpected storm set in.

A storm!—the breeze of Fate, for it had a curious effect upon the Missionary's destinies. She had been invited to Mrs. Landvetter's to sup and spend the evening, and in spite of the threatening skies had gone, for she very largely ignored the weather; but the storm increased so steadily in violence that after supper, as they sat about the hearth, she began to fear she might not be able to make her way to the cabin that night.

"Mein gracious! How dat vind blow!" exclaimed Mrs. Landvetter, as a cold gust from the peaks rattled the narrow windows and the rain beat wildly upon the roof.

"Look how de water creep under de door, und de lamps flare up!" nodding at the thin flames which rose suddenly and then fell in the two oil-lamps on the newly scoured deal table. "Vell, I hope dis drive Mis' Nitschkan home. You can't go back to-night, Missioner. You got to sleep mit Ethel."

"I'm afraid I will have to stay if it will not inconvenience you, Ethel," returned Frances.

"You know it won't. I'm awful glad to have you," said the girl who leaned against the rough stone chim-

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ney. Her tone, though sincere, was preoccupied, and it was evident that something rested heavily on her mind.

"Oh, I wish it would stop!" she cried, glancing nervously toward Campbell, who sat huddled on a low stool before the stove, and with restless fingers turned the leaves of the Bible on his knee. "It's sure to bring on one of his spells. I've seen it comin' ever since the wind began to blow."

"Oh, yes, always," was the phlegmatic response of Mrs. Landvetter, as she adjusted the pins in the lace pillow on her lap.

But again the wind rose, and so madly that the stout door of the cabin tore at its iron bolt and the windows rattled until it seemed as if the glass would break.

While the women stared apprehensively at the growing pool of water under the door, Andrew Campbell suddenly cast his Bible upon the floor, and with wild, strange eyes peering from his mat of grey hair and tangled whiskers, watched the white slant of rain drive against the panes.

On such nights as these one of those waves of despair which occasionally broke on his partly eclipsed brain was especially prone to sweep over him, and now, in an almost incoherent storm of words, he began to pour out his grief.

"It was nigh this time of the year," his speech marked by a stronger Scotch accent than usual and broken by sobs, "and my wife, Ruth, and my son, we

THE NEW MISSIONER

were a' up in our cabin on Corona—ah, but we were happy!—happy!” He lost himself in haggard reverie. “Aye, that was it,” with passionate conviction; “we were too happy—we had turned our thoughts from God—we had forgotten. It had been raining for a week—but the creek had kept its banks.

“Ethel, listen, listen!” clutching her arm with tense fingers, as the wind again shrieked about the cabin. “The wind was like that—we paid no heed. Ruth stirred the parritch for our supper—then there came a mighty roaring, like that of the sea—it was a' dark in a moment. The teembers o' the cabin strained and snapped—and we were a' out in the cold, cold water. Ethel—I—I—” he writhed in the torture of remembrance—“I—was saved; and—they—were lost.”

At his first words the girl had flown to him, and kneeling by his side had thrown one arm protectingly about him; and now she patted him rhythmically on the back, murmuring, “There, there,” as if soothing a baby. Her pale face, with its pretty cleft mouth and big grey eyes, was pressed against the old man's arm and her ashen-fair hair overflowed his shoulder.

Frances leaned forward with pitiful gaze, as if anxious to help; but Mrs. Landvetter considered her two boarders with unsoftened, ruminative eyes, as she methodically placed and replaced her lace pins.

“Vell, dat is yours,” was her deep-voiced, indifferent comment. “Efferybody has got deirs comin' to dem. Look at me! I vas forty-nine last Lady's Day, und I ain't neffer had a silk dress.” She paused in her

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

work and lost herself in the interest of her narrative. "Vonce, ven I vork in de onion field pretty steady yet, I beg some money from mein mutter und valk two miles to town. I vas goin' to haf a silk vaist like de odder girls. Yust as I got to de store door poppy, he caught me. He valk me home und gif me a goot beatin', I tell you; und I ain't neffer got my silk dress yet."

The old man looked at her with a dawning interest in his distraught eyes, sympathy softening the anguish of his gaze. "And you have suffered? I never thought that," he muttered, shaking his head.

"Vell," with a wink at the girl, "I ain't neffer had a silk dress. Ain't dat straight, Ethel?"

"Oh, la!" cried Ethel, a glow of excitement on her face. "Silk dresses! I have had a plenty of them in my time, five and six at once." She gave a final pat to the old man and rose to her feet. "The kind that stand alone, some of 'em. You know," vivaciously. "Why, Missioner, I've had things 'most as fine as Lutie's. Satins, brocades, failles, grosgrains, taffetas, all kinds, anything I wanted. My!" with a reminiscent, vain little laugh, "I certainly had my share of the vanities of the world, 'fore I give 'em all up for Christ's sake.

"Why, the day of the very night that I was convicted of sin—that was down to the Springs, y' know, Missioner, an' I thought, poor blind sinner that I was, that I was havin' the time of my life—Tom, a gentleman friend of mine, had just struck a pocket of free gold, an' we was celebratin'. I was keepin' his roll for

THE NEW MISSIONER

him. The boys all knew that they could trust me to any extent" (in a parenthesis of pride).

"Oh, I ain't tryin' to say a good word for myself—anyone whose sins was as scarlet as mine had better not try that on; but I never stole a cent, an' I wouldn't lie to please you.

"Well, that morning Tom give me his roll—he was a awful generous fellow—an' he says: 'Ethel, it's as much yours as it's mine, little girl; peel off what you like.'

"Well, 'course I took him up. I peeled off a hundred and fifty then and there an' blew in every cent for lingery. I always was crazy about lingery. Why, Mis' Landvetter, I bought me one petticoat that was nothing but insertion an' lace ruffles clean to the waist—lace this wide, y' know," measuring the depth of her fingers. "And I never put it on, neither; for that very night I heard Mr. Campbell here speakin' to a crowd on the street, an' every word he said went right home," placing her hand to her heart, "and I knew I was saved by the blood of the Lamb.

"But, la! men don't know what temptation is. When the devil gets after me, he keeps whisperin' of pretty things. He tries to get me into stores, jus' to see 'em an' finger 'em." She laughed triumphantly. "He had me so tight he didn't want to give me up, did he, Mr. Campbell?"

But Campbell paid no heed to their talk, his thoughts were occupied with the plaint to which Mrs. Landvetter had given utterance. Having laid bare to her the an-

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

guish of his soul, he assumed that her secret despair had risen up and answered it. That her cause of grief was slight to absurdity, he did not pause to analyse—perhaps was incapable of doing so. He simply accepted her words that “efferybody has deirs comin’ to dem.” He had his sorrow; she had hers. It mattered little what form it took, whether it were the terror by night, or the destruction that wasteth at noonday. His was the loss of wife, home, and child; hers the ungratified longing for a silk dress.

His mind thus withdrawn from his own trouble, he sat more calmly, pondering over this revelation in a nature which he had never suspected of ethical yearnings, and suddenly felt himself drawn to the hard, unsympathetic hausfrau by the ties of a common understanding.

Mrs. Landvetter’s thoughts, however, were busy with things far removed from silk dresses. Her ideas had gained a new impetus, and all night her shrewd wits were working over a plan by which Campbell’s usefulness to herself might be considerably augmented.

The next morning she arose with her plan fully matured and the determination to put it into execution as speedily as possible.

The storm was so violent that its fury had exhausted itself before daybreak, and the sun shone upon a freshly washed, if somewhat desolate, world. Great branches had blown from the trees, and the leaves lay over the ground so thickly that it surprised one to see that any still remained upon the boughs.

THE NEW MISSIONER

"Campbell, he tracks out pretty soon now," remarked Mrs. Landvetter to Ethel and Frances, as they stood watching her hang out the clothes which she had risen before dawn to wash. "I got a plan for him, und I vant you und Missioner, Ethel, to kind o' coax him into it."

Ethel looked at her with quick suspicion. "What scheme you tryin' to work off on him now?" she asked sharply.

Mrs. Landvetter took a clothespin from between her teeth and pinned up a sheet to the line. "Vell," she began slowly, "I don't see no reason vy, instead of sellin' my laces to dose agents dat takes deir money oudt before I gets mine, I shouldn't get dat old Campbell to peddle 'em ven he goes over de mountains, hein?"

"He won't like it," replied Ethel, "and he won't do it. Oh, I know," as the German woman was about to interrupt her, "you think anything's good enough for him. You just see a little, half-cracked, withered stump of a man, don't you, like most folks does around here? But if he'd wrestled for your soul like he done for mine, you'd see Christ's messenger, same as I do. And he shan't go for to peddle." She turned toward the gate.

"But, Ethel, yet," explained Mrs. Landvetter, snatching at her gown, "tink how goot it vould be for him. Dose vimmen dat he shows de lace to dey looks after him some. Dey gif him a bed und a meal now und den. He can't look after hisself."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"That is true," said Frances, struck by the reasonableness of this presentation.

"I know it," admitted Ethel, with reluctance, "an' maybe I will ask him to help you out. Mind, I ain't promisin', though; I got to think it over." She walked abruptly to the gate with brooding eyes and compressed lips.

"I haf so mooch laces," continued Mrs. Landvetter to Frances; "ten yards in de pineapple pattern, und twelve in de roses' point, und eight in de flur de lisses, und mooch odders. I tink I make dat old man sell dem all right," with an emphatic nod of her head.

"I really think it is rather a good idea, Mrs. Landvetter," said Frances thoughtfully. "As you say, he would be well taken care of."

"Dat is so. Dat is what I say." And feeling sufficiently bolstered by Frances's approbation, she lost no time in notifying Campbell of her project for making him useful. He shook his shaggy head and thrust out an obstinate lower jaw.

"Am I to peddle laces, woman? I gang to the mountains for meditation on the meesteries and for the finding of ore by means of my gift. And I will not peddle laces."

For a day or two he remained obstinate, in defiance of her rough pleading, and consequently she deemed it wise to defer discussion of the subject until Ethel came home a day or two later. Then she turned her batteries on the girl, until Ethel sought the Missionary for counsel. Frances, still impressed by Mrs. Landvetter's

THE NEW MISSIONER

reasoning, threw the weight of her influence on the side of the latter. Consequently, when the old man mentioned the subject with shamefaced apology, Ethel was ready with her answer.

"I know, she spoke to me about it, Mr. Campbell, and it don't seem right, indeed it don't. For my part, I don't think you ought to do a thing but stand in the pulpit and preach. Still, I'd feel a sight easier about you if you would undertake to sell her laces. It wouldn't be peddlin', really it wouldn't, Mr. Campbell; it would just be accommodatin' a friend."

He considered this view of the question with a brightening face and finally accepted it. "Ah, well," with resignation, "say no more about it. I will do it."

So one morning, when the sun lay mellowly over the aspens, whose leaves were turning to gold under the sharp touch of discipline administered by the frost, and the maples were hung with thousands of serrated, scarlet banners, which floated and gleamed through the pines, austere dark, permanently green, old Andrew Campbell trudged up the road toward the shining, snow-clad peaks, his wire in his hand and Mrs. Landvetter's laces snugly stowed away in his pack.

And as he pursued his wanderings, he drew these forth from time to time with wonderful results, for the women on whose hearthstones he sat regarded him with an almost superstitious awe and prized his wares above their value. By day he prospected with his wire and his cabalistic figures; at nightfall, in the isolated cabins,

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

he expounded his "meesterries" and casually and somewhat reluctantly exhibited Mrs. Landvetter's laces.

His very indifference increased the eagerness of his purchasers. They recognised in him a different type of peddler from the usual brisk, business-like, anxious-to-sell variety. He drifted into their cabins and spoke to them prophet-wise of things alien to their intelligence, but which roused in them their latent veneration for the seer.

And in the different villages where he sojourned briefly, he wandered into the gambling houses, as naively sure of his welcome as in the cabins. In fact, these constituted his market places, for this unworldly old man, to whom life's realities were its mysteries, was well known among the worshippers of the blind Madonna of chance.

But the season was a bad one. Mr. Campbell found it difficult to arouse interest even in the few claims he took up. The wire, too, proved singularly capricious; and although the old man stood patiently on the rocks for hours at a time repeating his magical numbers, his divining rod seldom trembled in his hand.

Then, too, the days, although still golden, were growing shorter, and there was a nipping touch in the air which warned the old prospector that the snow would soon drift over his trails, and that to turn his face homeward were the part of discretion; when suddenly, by one of those sardonic jests of Fate, which sometimes tempt one to believe one's self but a pawn on

THE NEW MISSIONER

the chessboard in a match game between the powers of good and evil, his progress was unexpectedly delayed.

Longer than was his wont, Campbell had tarried in one camp where he hoped the ore might prove responsive to his quest; and there in the garishly decorated saloons he gave the people the benefit of his mysticism and the opportunity of purchasing his claims—opportunities, in the main, neglected or ignored.

But this sordid, squalid little mining village, with its magnificent environment of snow-capped summits, whispering pines, and mellow sunlight, was experiencing a long-anticipated, infrequent excitement. There came a fair or festival week, and Mr. Campbell, dazed but interested, found himself jostled, hurried along by a tide of men and women, hailed by name, the centre of laughing groups. The village for the nonce had become the magnetic lodestone of those effervescent spirits from neighbouring camps on whom the hills had for months laid their repressive spell.

It was all so strange and disturbing that Campbell lost what little sense he had of life's everyday proportions. For hours during the day, and until long after midnight, he wandered about, possessed by the spirit of excitement and restlessness in the air.

At last, during one of his peregrinations, he paused before the window of a shop, his attention arrested by the sumptuous display behind the glass.

"Man, man," he murmured; "that is silk, and Mrs. Landvetter has never had a silk dress. Why," with brightening eyes, "I will take her one; it will be a

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

surprise for her. But," his face falling, "it will doubtless be very costly."

He drew out an old wallet from an inner pocket and, untying the string which bound it, carefully examined its contents. It held but a little silver, and he shook his head sadly as he wound the string around it once more and thrust it back. "The pity of it! The pity of it! But," he considered, his face suddenly alight, "I have money from the sale of her foolish lacework, the miserable money that she will hoard away in a stocking because she does not know that there are silk dresses so near her."

Finally, under the spur of this suggestion, he drifted within and asked to look at silk pieces. Bolt after bolt was unrolled for his inspection and held up to catch the light.

"Beautiful selection, sir," said the clerk genially.

"Aye," agreed Campbell. "I was thinking of a lady," he continued slowly and impressively, "who has never had a silk dress."

"Well, judging from the standpoint of women, that lady has never really lived," remarked the clerk. "You ought to set that straight, right off. Now, just because we're selling at closing-out prices, I'm going to let you have your choice of anything here."

"I do not know what colour she would prefer," demurred Campbell; "whether the yellow or the red."

"How old's the lady?" asked the clerk, leaning across the counter.

Mr. Campbell considered. "Forty-nine last Lady's

THE NEW MISSIONER

Day," he said carefully, "whatever Papist festival that may be."

"Then she'll want black," the clerk spoke with decisive finality. "I bet all these years she's had her heart set on a black silk dress."

His arguments were more than convincing; but although visibly wavering, Mr. Campbell held to his original intention of prudence. "This is an important matter to decide," he said with dignity; "I must discuss it with my wife."

But Ruth, mythical and complaisant counsellor, evidently viewed the question in the same light as himself. There seemed to arise no misgivings as to his ethical right to spend Mrs. Landvetter's money for a silk dress.

Campbell, in his scrupulous delicacy, would have starved to death before he would have taken a penny of the sum to buy himself a crust of bread; but in the instance before him he saw only the opportunity of granting to a fellow-being a long-cherished heart's desire. Therefore he returned to the store the following day and for the sum of twenty-five dollars purchased the silk dress, with accompanying buttons, thread, linings, etc., which the clerk assured him were necessary for the proper making of a gown.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MISS EVELYN SOURRIER was enjoying her experience in Zenith as much, if not more, than anything she had ever known in all her varied and agreeable existence. The freedom of the life, the absence of blue china standards, the peculiarities of the people she met in this remote mining village all delighted her. Especially did she profess herself charmed with Frances and her home.

The tiny cabin nestling against the ledge of rock, with the aspens quivering over it, the brook that foamed down the deep gully before the door, the black-robed, composed figure of the Missionary herself, all appealed to her imagination. The picture seemed so complete, so suited to its environment, and Frances, so reserved, so controlled, showing only glimpses of the woman in occasional, revealing glances of her dark eyes, and her strange, sweet, unexpected smiles, had become to Evelyn a fascinating puzzle.

Consequently, during the second week that Garvin's guests remained with him, there was scarcely a day that this light-hearted, laughing girl did not climb the hill to the Missionary's door and beg to be allowed to make herself a cup of tea. She loved to play with Frances's dainty kitchen utensils, all stowed away, fair

THE NEW MISSIONER

and shining, in the little cupboard behind the stove. It made her feel as if she were a child again and playing with her dolls.

But Frances's little cabin was not the only one in which she sipped tea. She had, with a most endearing grace of manner, made herself very much at home in Zenith, and the consensus of the camp's opinion was duly expressed by Mrs. Thomas:

"I mus' say for her," remarked that lady, with a judicial air of giving the devil his due, "that she's always called on me as one lady might on another. I ain't seen no signs of any soup kitchen airs or any totin' around of red flannels, like you read about in them English novels. 'Course it's kind o' sad to think of Walt havin' all them high-jinks goin' on at the house an' Lutie hardly cold in her grave; but then not bein' really married, Walt don't have to keep up a show of mournin' like a man's bound to for a wife."

But if Zenith consented to forego for once her cherished rights of criticism and voice approval of Miss Sourrier, the English girl expressed an equally flattering opinion of Zenith as she sat on the Missionary's doorstep, sipping her third cup of tea.

"I do like it here," she said, with a sigh of content. "Freedom, open air, good sport—what more could one ask? It's just the life I love; and was there ever such a delicious, quaint camp? I am fascinated by everyone, but most of all by that strange, beautiful creature they call the Black Pearl. I've watched her standing in her gate or working in her garden day after day, look-

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ing out at the mountains with those great, shadowy eyes of hers, or talking to that dandy-looking gambler—what's his name? Bob Flick—and I have never seen anyone who has so stirred my imagination as she. I lie awake at night to make up romances about her. They say that she was a wonderful dancer, known all over the Southwest, and that she gave it up to marry that ripping-looking husband of hers. Isn't that a romance in itself?"

She paused a moment to spread some bits of biscuit on the edge of her gown to lure nearer the chipmunks peering at her with bright, bead-like eyes from behind the rocks, and then scampering off, speedily to return.

When she spoke again it was of Garvin, describing with a very real enthusiasm some incident in which she considered that he had shown courage and exceptional powers of resource.

"Father and I have drifted about the world a lot, and of course known quantities of men; but Mr. Garvin is really one of the most remarkable men I've ever known; so simple, so natural, so cultivated, too, with no nonsense about him. Millionaires are usually so objectionable." Her interest and admiration vibrated through her low, charming voice.

"Everyone likes and admires him," said Frances, her eyes bent on her sewing, and in an endeavour to speak naturally her voice, even to herself, sounded cold and constrained; but Evelyn was apparently oblivious of her lack of enthusiasm.

"I sometimes fear my high spirits must jar on him

THE NEW MISSIONER

so soon after his wife's death. He often seems pre-occupied and distrait."

His wife! Frances threw her a quick glance, but Evelyn's eyes were innocent.

"Do tell me about her," she continued. "Was he very much in love with her? Mrs. Thomas was telling me the other day about her demand for laces and jewels and all that sort of thing up to almost the last moment before her death, and how Mr. Garvin strove to gratify every wish. He would be that way, wouldn't he? But she must have been very silly."

Frances drew a sigh of relief. Zenith had been discreet.

"Lutie was very lovable." It was almost a formula.

"Oh, he is wonderful, wonderful!" murmured the English girl. She crumbled some more biscuit in her hand and threw it to the chipmunks, and Frances gazed at her with eyes that took in every detail. The pale gold of her faultlessly dressed hair, the smooth, firm outline of an incomparably tinted cheek; the delicate, high-bred nose; eyes set in the head like jewels, sapphire eyes that had only looked on pleasant things; the long, graceful limbs, supple with every form of outdoor exercise; the slender, white hands, now folded about her knees, and her beautifully modelled feet.

She was indeed a princess of a fairy tale, and Frances mentally saw herself beside this radiant creature, plain, quiet, without even the redeeming touch of youth; and the dagger of jealousy pierced her heart.

"I never saw such an Aladdin," continued Evelyn

CHAPTER NINETEEN

enthusiastically. "All he has to do is to rub his lamp and there is whatever he wishes. A day or two ago I happened to say that if the mountains had a lack, it was roses. He smiled, and we drifted into something else; but this morning great boxes, positively bales of them, came. I never saw so many roses in my life before. The house is transformed into an English rose-garden."

A shadow fell across Frances's face, a shadow that remained during the rest of the day, until toward evening she saw Herries staggering up the hill with an enormous box on his shoulder. "I guess Walt's cornered the rose market," he said, twisting his mouth after his accustomed fashion. "He's got a whole houseful of them on the flats, and now he's sent you a houseful." He put the box down and took off the lid.

"Oh, if I could only keep them always!" she cried, her eyes grown moist and radiant at the sight of their beauty.

"You may," said Herries. "You will be able to perform that miracle if you wish. You may have them fresh every day if you like." He glanced at her half-humorously, half wistfully from under his shaggy brows and spoke with obvious meaning.

"Where, where shall I put them all?" she asked, flushing painfully. "I have no beautiful vases. We shall have to use common things, like buckets and pails."

Herries helped her arrange the flowers in anything they could find that would hold water, and when they

THE NEW MISSIONER

had finished the roses filled every space of her narrow chamber. The long, green stems with their shining leaves fell across each other and made a lattice, while the roses that starred them glowed against her white-washed walls like a crimson arabesque of love. The fragrance seemed to blow from the heart of June, and Frances, sitting alone in the evening, felt herself actually permeated by the sweetness, and the spell of beauty and colour and fragrance became every moment more potent.

Then through the deepening twilight she saw Garvin and Evelyn strolling up the hill together. The English girl wore some kind of a gauzy, white gown which defined her tall, Diana-like figure. She was hatless, and above the coils of her fair hair was a wreath of roses arranged like a coronet. As they passed Frances's cabin there floated back to her the sound of Evelyn's soft and musical laughter.

The Missionary sat for a few moments in silence, and then went into her little inner chamber, and, lighting a candle, scanned her own reflection in her small mirror.

She held the light high, and in the faint, flickering flame of the candle the shadows about her eyes were accentuated and the lines deepened. She could not see the soul which gave life and character to her face; she could only see the hollows of the temples, the sombre eyes, the square outlines of the jaw in a face never beautiful according to any canons of beauty.

She put the candle down, and resting her elbows on

CHAPTER NINETEEN

the bureau, sunk her chin in her hands and gazed long at her own reflection. From the dim depths of her being another self seemed to rise and ask probing, imperative questions.

“Do you love him?”

“Do I love him?” she murmured, shaken by such a tide of passionate emotion as she had never known. “Do I love him?” The question itself was an affirmation.

The fragrance and colour in which she had lived and moved and breathed all day wrought their spell, and the shadowy self, the woman who worked and planned and thought, retired to some far limbo of consciousness, while the woman who loved asserted herself, the jealousy of which she had felt the first pang when she heard Evelyn Sourrier’s laughter ached like a dagger working its slow, twisting way through her heart, and the cruel, implacable feminine—the gliding, sinuous, subtle serpent of the feminine—rose and hispered.

It was she Garvin loved, not the English girl—but she, Frances. It seemed to her now that she must always have known it, from the first moment they had gazed into each other’s eyes; but, nevertheless, she hated the English girl. She could have torn the roses from Evelyn’s hair. There were no roses in her hair. No; but if there were, she would not wear them as did Evelyn. Her roses, she instinctively knew, would never be plucked in a demure English garden and blown upon by the wholesome winds of the breezy down. The woman

THE NEW MISSIONER

who loved smiled scornfully at the thought. She craved the musky, heavy-headed roses grown in the very heart of the Venusberg.

Herries's words came back to her. He had said she could wear roses if she would. Well, she would. She tore down the tightly pinned-up braids and let them hang over her shoulder, great glistening black coils that swung heavily almost to the floor. Hastily she pinned above each ear a cluster of red roses. With hurried fingers she removed the waist of her gown; her shoulders were still white and firm, her throat a smooth column. Oh, they were not unfitted for the display of jewels! But not diamonds; she would not wear those cold, sparkling jewels that Lutie loved, but blood-red rubies, and opals with hearts of fire gleaming through faint mist films—symbols of power.

The serpent whispered the old, eternal feminine lure, and the passion for adornment, stronger and more vital because so long repressed, came upon her. Was she not beloved by one of earth's conquerors? And he, and she would go out into the world from these mountains where he had amassed his great golden hoard. Go out magicians who could transmute gold to beauty, and colour, and luxury, and power; and the kingdoms of the world should be theirs.

The serpent whispered as ever of the apple, and the eternal feminine stretched forth her hand—when there came a loud, though tremulous, knocking upon the door. Frances paused only to lift the roses from her hair and ran to answer the summons.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Who is there?" she called, her fingers on the bolt.

"It is me, Ethel," was the sobbing answer.

The Missionary made haste to unbar the door, and the girl stumbled over the threshold. "Oh, Missioner!" she cried. "Save me, save me! The Devil's got me; he's got me for everlasting!"

Her face was sodden with tears, her hair fell wildly over it; brokenly, she poured forth her story of what had happened, and Frances from her almost incoherent words gradually gathered an impression of the actual occurrence.

Mr. Campbell had finally returned from his wanderings. About sunset he stood in the doorway of Mrs. Landvetter's cabin, and Ethel, bubbling with a voluble welcome, had sprung to meet him. She had caught, she explained to Frances, an immediate impression of something new in his expression, something responsive, almost buoyant. It was as if the blight which had so long overfallen him had been partly erased. There he stood, smiling, mysterious, alert.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you back," she cried. "Oh, I tell you I have missed you; but the change has done you good. You do look well."

"Aye, and I have some surprises for you all," with a certain sly glee, as he placed the long, narrow package on the table. "I have a vairse which will take me the winter to ponder oot, and I have something for Mrs. Landvetter—something she has wished for a' her life!"

"For pity's sake! Ain't you the kindest little man!"

THE NEW MISSIONER

said Ethel tenderly. "To remember her after the way—but still now, that ain't Christian. There she is now," as Mrs. Landvetter passed the window and threw open the door, a billet of wood in her hard, red arms. When she saw Campbell a smile widened the corners of her mouth, and avarice shone in her eyes.

"Vell, Mr. Campbell, how you vas? Excoose me, v'ile I puts down dis vood und den I gif you a hand. Vell, vell! So, so. You didn't get lost, nor nuttin', hein? Sit down v'ile I make you a cup of coffee."

With a sly glance at Ethel, Campbell took his old seat on the stool, his cherished package laid carefully across his knees.

Mrs. Landvetter was aware that there were certain formalities prescribed by etiquette to be observed before she could put the one paramount question; but she determined to make these as brief as possible. Consequently, a generous piece of wood was thrust into the stove, and the coffee pot was filled and put on to boil, with an obvious bustle.

And now for the formalities. "Vell, *wie gehts* in de mountains? De wire done goot, I guess?"

Her boarder thrust out his lower jaw. "No," he returned. "It was not good."

"Dat vas too bad. But de vetter; he vas nice, wasn't he?"

"Beautiful," assented Mr. Campbell.

Mrs. Landvetter sighed with relief. She had paid her mint and anise and cummin to Mrs. Grundy. "Und," leaning eagerly forward and speaking with an almost

CHAPTER NINETEEN

tremulous jocularly, "und haf you brought all mein laces back, or haf you lost dem?"

"I have sold them a'."

"Effery piece?" she screamed incredulously. "Effery piece?"

"Every piece," he answered.

"Vell, you *vas* a goot liddle man. Und how mooch did dey bring; how mooch?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

"Twenty-five dollars? Mein Gott, you *vas* de best effer!" hugging herself and rocking back and forth in her glee. "Twenty-five dollars! Und now," with outstretched, visibly itching fingers, "v'ere is de money?"

"It's a' in this package." He slowly unrolled the paper from the silk. "There it is!"

The huge German woman looked at him for a moment in astonishment. "Vat you givin' me, Campbell?" she asked roughly.

He still smiled. "You have never had a silk dress in your life," his words tumbled over each other at the thought of the magnitude of the joy he was conferring, "and I have bought you one with the money I got from the sale of your laces."

Mrs. Landvetter looked at him a moment with a purpling face. Then she sprang at him. "You bought dat silk mit my money? Den, by Gott, I break your head!" She rushed toward the pile of wood on the hearth, and seizing a thick stick, struck blindly in the air.

But Ethel, lithe and quick, had sprung from her

THE NEW MISSIONER

seat at the table, picking up something as she ran—something that gleamed long and shining in her hand.

“Don’t you touch him, or I’ll kill you!” she threatened, catching the larger woman by the arm. Her face was dead white, her narrowed eyes glittered like a cat’s, her gasping voice was scarcely audible. “You—it ain’t the first time I’ve used a knife! The jury has let me off twice, an’ they would again, you bet. Drop that stick, I tell you! Drop it!” Then, as Mrs. Landvetter wavered, but still held her ground, she bent the long thin blade almost double and let it snap back in the older woman’s face.

The mighty Hun recoiled, but still snarling and showing her fangs. “I vant my money,” she muttered stubbornly; “und, by Gott, I get it out of him!”

“Yes, I know you, you dirty coward. You’ll wait till I’m gone and then take it out of him, and rattle him so that he won’t never get straight again. Well, you won’t get the chance; for I’ll pay you your old money now. I’ll take the silk off your hands. It ain’t the first time I’ve wore silk, by a long sight!”

She tore open her gown and drew a chamois bag from her bosom. Unfastening it, she counted out some crumpled bills and loose silver. “There’s your money,” contemptuously; “twenty-five dollars. Put it down in your stocking now. Get it safe, do!”

“V’ere you get it, Ethel?” Mrs. Landvetter clutched the money, fawned over it, and yet feared to hold it.

“None of your damn business where I got it! You

CHAPTER NINETEEN

drop that wood and go on out to your washtubs!" She stamped her foot, and then, seeing the other hesitate, motioned with her knife toward the door. "Go on, I say!"

As Mrs. Landvetter closed the door behind her Ethel threw her weapon on the table and ran to old Andrew Campbell, who crouched upon the floor close to the wall, holding his grey head with his hands.

"Come, come," she crooned brokenly; "come with Ethel."

He said no word, but at the sound of her voice, arose feebly, and passively let her lead him to his dark little room off the kitchen. She had almost to lift him upon his bunk, and then she knelt beside him, spent with her fury, shaken with hysterical tears.

At last he turned his haggard face with its wild, miserable eyes to hers. "I do not care if she shook me," he muttered hoarsely; "I do not care if she did not like the silk. But I cannot forgive her, and I can never pray again, and I cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

"But," Ethel checked her sobs to soothe him, "if you don't care that she shook you, and if you don't care that she didn't like the silk, what makes you feel so bad?"

"Because," he answered with solemn anguish, "she lifted a great stick and struck my Ruth; and I can never forgive her." His words trailed as he lapsed into despair.

Ethel was bewildered for a moment, and then, with a

THE NEW MISSIONER

dawning comprehension of his trouble, she looked about her helplessly. There seemed no way in which she could minister to this mind diseased.

But again she turned her perplexed, despairing glance toward the bed where Campbell lay; and as she gazed at that waif—conquered, overwhelmed, beaten by life—the light of love shone in her eyes and in her sad, pitying smile.

“Listen, Mr. Campbell,” bending above him and speaking with imperative, tender distinctness. “It wasn’t your Ruth who got hit. It was me—just only Ethel. She give me a whack across the arm, and you’ve got us mixed up. How could you? Why, your Ruth stood beside you all the time.”

He half raised himself in the bed, new hope dawning in his eyes. But they clouded again with suspicion. His trembling hands plucked at her sleeve. “Let me see,” he said, “where she struck you.”

Her lips paled; then she lifted her head with a reckless laugh. “It don’t show yet, dear; but it will be all black and blue by to-morrow. You’ll see.” Smiling tenderly at him, she rose to her feet and walked to the small, narrow window. Leaning her head against the rough sash, she looked out upon the grey of the hills now blurred in twilight. Her fair hair fell about her white face, her scarlet mouth drooped forlornly. At last she turned, and with the instinctive idea of seeking comfort somewhere, had struggled blindly, almost unconsciously, up the hill to Frances’s cabin.

“And, oh, Missioner,” she wailed with a hysterical,



J. Walter Lloyd

"Listen, Mr. Campbell"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

choking catch in her voice, "I ain't never lied nor stole till to-day. No matter what else I've done, I've always been a lady that way. But," with the last abandonment of despair, "I guess if I could fall so low as to steal what I collected for the Army, I needn't let a little thing like a lie stick in my throat." She dropped her face in her hands. "I've tried to raise myself; I've tried to be somebody—but what's the use! It seems like even God was against me."

For answer, Frances gathered the girl's trembling, sob-racked body in her arms and held her closely, warmly against her heart, smoothing back the hair from the damp brow, and crooning over her as a mother might have done, murmuring tender, consoling words. At last, when Ethel lay against her quiet, but exhausted, she placed her gently in a chair and left her for a moment, to return presently with a roll of bills in her hands.

"There, Ethel," she said, "is twenty-five dollars. It is yours. The Army is paid back now, and you owe it nothing. You owe me nothing either, for you have given me the happiness of helping you."

Ethel's dazed eyes lightened. She stretched out an eager and yet hesitating hand toward the money; and then her face fell again into its woful lines. "But it don't wipe out the sin," she cried; "it don't wipe out the sin!" and fell again into her wild weeping.

"Listen! Stop crying! Listen to me!" Frances's voice was imperative now. "You sinned to spare Mr. Campbell suffering. You sinned because you couldn't

THE NEW MISSIONER

stand by and see cruelty, no matter what the cost to yourself. You sinned through love, Ethel, and those sins are quickly forgiven, blotted out. See how easily even I could help you. Ah, Ethel, I wonder that I call them sins"—she forgot the girl. "'Tis man's perdition to be safe,'" her thought turning to her beloved Emerson, "'even from what he or anyone else might call sin—when he ought to forget himself wholly'——" She was far beyond Ethel now, and the girl plucked at her sleeve.

"But I backslid," she persisted, still hysterically self-accusing. "I thought I was redeemed; and I'm just as bad as ever. I went for Mrs. Landvetter with a knife. I can't understand it. I thought my feet was planted on a rock, and I slid back just as easy. I thought I was on the rock so solid that the gates of Hell couldn't prevail against me; an' I slid back just as easy. Oh, I can't understand it!"

"Nor I," said Frances sadly; "nor any of us. Come, Ethel, you must stay with me to-night and rest."

It was not a difficult matter to persuade the worn-out girl to remain with her, and the Missionary quickly helped her to undress, soothing and comforting her meanwhile and sitting beside her until Ethel closed her heavy eyes in sleep.

Then with swift, light movements, Frances gathered up the roses she had torn from her hair and bosom, and which lay, scattered and fading about the floor, and carried them out into the night.

On her little bridge, with the cool wind blowing about

CHAPTER NINETEEN

her, she buried her face in them for a moment, inhaling, in one deep breath, all their beauty and fragrance. "I do not understand it either, Ethel, how—we—can—slip—backward," she murmured, and then cast the roses into the shallow, rushing water of the stream.

CHAPTER TWENTY

MRS. EVANS, bearing loaves and fishes, and accompanied by Mrs. Thomas, climbed the mountain road to Frances's cabin. Night was just falling, the blackness beginning to be spangled with stars.

"I- jus' brought a loaf of salt-risin' bread, Missioner, I baked fresh this afternoon, an' some lemon-jelly cake. Marthy's a-carryin' it. Here, Marthy, put it down on the table."

"It's sure a frosty night," throwing off her cape and hood and accepting the chair Frances offered her, "an' it looks cosey as you please in here. Well, Missioner," with importance, "Marthy an' me took a little time off to bring you the news. Sadie Nitschkan's comin' home to-morrow. Some campers that's just got in brought the word to Jack."

"It's been six weeks an' more since Jack wrote her, commandin' her to come back the minute she got the letter, an' she ain't paid no more attention to it than if he was catnip," announced Mrs. Thomas.

"Well, she's goin' to get her lesson now," Mrs. Evans made the affirmation complacently. "It don't always do to go up against a husband when his blood's up."

"If Jack'll only stay firm." Mrs. Thomas's tone seemed to imply a pessimistic doubt of all men.

"Of course he'll stay firm," the tiny woman threw

CHAPTER TWENTY

the Venus Colossal an impatient glance. "He's got the whole of us backin' him, ain't he? 'Course, Missioner," explanatorily, "we ain't really goin' to let him turn Sadie out, like he feels like now; but he's goin' to give her a good scare. She's got to be disciplined."

"Well, I hope she's enjoyed her gipsyin'," Mrs. Thomas spoke piously. "Say, Missioner, ain't it awful the way the Pearl's carryin' on with Bob Flick? Folks is talkin' somethin' fierce. There's goin' to be trouble sure." Her sparkling eyes expressed a relish of the dramatic possibilities in the situation. "Maybe," doubtfully, "Sadie can do somethin' with the Pearl when she comes back; but it's sure that no one else can. Somebody's goin' to tell Shock, sure as you're alive, an' everybody's wondering who it'll be. Most likely one of the boys 'll get drunk an' think it's his duty to speak up. Oh, it's an awful thing!" virtuously. "Bob, he's one of the cold, reckless kind, an' the Pearl, she's one of the hot, reckless kind. Lord!" with a shiver of pleasurable anticipation, "I'm scared."

"Yes, it's sure awful," assented Mrs. Evans absently. "Come, Marthy," rising, "we got to go home an' put the kids to bed. We got a hard day's work before us to-morrow with Sadie, an' we'd better be gettin' a good night's rest."

Frances strolled out onto her little bridge with her departing guests. The night was like black velvet, set thickly with the cold sparkle of stars. It seemed but a moment after her visitors made their last adieux that they were swallowed up in the gloom. Yet a few minutes

THE NEW MISSIONER

later she was surprised to hear the patter of Mrs. Evans's feet on the bridge.

"I—I sent Marthy on, Missioner, an' jus' come back for a second." It was the only time Frances had ever seen the assured Mrs. Evans in the least embarrassed. "Missioner," even in the dim light her cold little face showed agitation. "Missioner, I wasn't goin' to say a word to you, an' I made Marthy promise not to; but there's a good deal of talk—an' the bettin' stands even on you an' the English girl. You know the folks at Garvin's went away to-day; but some of the boys is bettin' that Walt won't let her stay long."

"Betting! On me! And Miss Sourrier?" Frances faltered, throwing back one arm and clutching the rail for support.

For once Mrs. Evans forgot her diplomacy and floundered in the bog of explanation. "Yes, as to which'll get—as to which Walt will—as to which will take Walt."

Frances's eyes blazed. Her mouth set in a bitter smile. It was with evident difficulty that she maintained her self-control; but she made no reply, only stood gazing down into the depths of the noisy, rushing stream.

After a moment of silence, Mrs. Evans stretched out her hand and laid it on the other woman's arm, the first demonstration of affection Frances had ever seen her show to anyone.

"Missioner," earnestly, "I know it ain't nothin' but gossip, I know how hard you're a-tryin' to save his

CHAPTER TWENTY

soul——” ignoring Frances’s protesting hand. “Yes, I do. And there ain’t no one that dares do any talkin’ to me. You don’t know what you mean to some of us, Missioner. You don’t know what a comfort you are. You’ve made us feel like we can always turn to you in any of our troubles, no matter how fool they seem. All our lives long, us women have been taught that when things bothered us too much, we could go to a man in a black coat an’ a white choker, an’ perhaps, a good many of us found out that was all there was to his spirituality. An’ often as not, when you’d laid out your poor, little troubles before him, lookin’ like mountains to you, you could see, for all he tried to hide it, that they was just about the size of marbles to him. Then he’d swell out his chest, an’ talk pious to you down in his throat, an’ you usual went home feelin’ like there was no comfort nowheres, ’cause ’course you’d been taught to believe that God’s jus’ a bigger man, an’ you felt sore at your heart an’ like you wanted to kick yourself, that is, if you was strong. If you was a weak sister an’ wanted to be hectored, you took his words for law an’ gospel.

“Why, look here, Missioner! Suppose you was a man. Do you believe the trouble between me an’ Sile would ever have been patched up yet? Not a bit of it; but you handled that job slick. God knows you did. An’ ever since, I been a-thinkin, a kind o’ hopin’, a ’most believin’ that it was a woman that was comin’ some day to comfort women. Not one of them mushy things that they call all heart, an’ that mourns with them that mourns,

THE NEW MISSIONER

like Marthy Thomas; but a woman with a head as well as a heart. A woman that knows enough to understand things, that's had her experiences and knows where she is at; that don't stand willing to cut the work she's chose, for the first man that looks at her. Not that kind; but a woman that's onto things. Missioner, you don't think I'm too fresh, do you?" taking alarm at Frances's continued silence. "I don't mean to be no smart Aleck. I oughtn't to have told you about that bettin'."

Mrs. Evans to plead! It smote Frances like a blow. "I should think," she murmured in a muffled voice, "I should think that my calling——" she stopped abruptly, too honest not to see the irony of claiming protection from her calling, when she gave free rein to conduct.

"But you ain't mad, Missioner? You forgive my speakin'?"

"Forgive!" The shadow of a smile deepened the pain of Frances's eyes. "Perhaps you are my best friend. Perhaps in all the world you are my best friend."

A little later when Garvin strode up the hillside, his heart singing the words he meant that his lips should soon utter—"They've gone, Missioner. Thank God they've gone!"—he was surprised and immeasurably disappointed to find the windows of the little cabin dark. Half-heartedly, he knocked once or twice upon the door and then turned dejectedly away. Yet, had he but known it, each rap had vibrated through the heart of the Missionary, who crouched inside, her hand upon the latch, ceaselessly and speechlessly murmuring: "A woman

CHAPTER TWENTY

that don't stand willing to cut the work she's chose for the first man that looks at her."

It was dawn before, still dressed, she threw herself upon her cot and almost immediately fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion. But if she continued to sleep far into the next morning, the village was early astir, for Zenith was of course aware of the stand Mr. Nitschkan had taken, and was fully determined to see the result of the impending struggle for supremacy; even though discretion urged to view it from a safe seclusion.

There were some souls of excitable imagination who predicted the complete demolishment of the Nitschkan home before the argument was satisfactorily concluded. But the public was doomed to disappointment in the first instance as to any show of spectacular demonstration on Mr. Nitschkan's part.

Carolling blithely and with no apparent premonition of trouble, Mrs. Nitschkan arrived at her gate. Bob with nimble fingers untied the frayed rope which held in place that frail portal, and his mother, leading the burros, passed through. No welcoming shouts of children greeted her; but the smoke curling whitely from the chimney, and the unshuttered windows, proclaimed the house inhabited. Otherwise there was no sign of life.

Within the kitchen, however, was a hastily assembled council, consisting of Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Landvetter. They sat about the stove, whereon hissed a coffeepot, while Mr. Nitschkan strode restlessly about the room. Mrs. Evans, who, in common with the other women, appeared slightly paler than usual, with

THE NEW MISSIONER

a somewhat strained expression about the eyes, was just about to pour herself a cup of coffee, when there came a thunderous knocking upon the door, causing her hand to shake so violently that she spilled half the contents of the pot on the floor.

"Now, Jack," she cautioned, as Mr. Nitschkan stood irresolute, "remember, you got to be firm. Give her a good fright an' make her promise there shan't be no more gipsyin' in hers 'fore you let her in."

"At least till the kids is old enough to go with her," added Mrs. Thomas *sotto voce*.

Nitschkan approached the window and pulling down the small, upper sash, leaned his elbows upon it and thrust out his bearded face.

"Hello, Jack," called his wife cheerily, "the door's stuck. Pull it open fer me, will you?"

"The door ain't stuck, Sadie," remarked Mr. Nitschkan, with solemn severity; "it's locked, an' it's locked a-purpose."

"Locked a-purpose!" echoed Sadie, pausing in her efforts to enter and peering at him as if she doubted the evidence of her senses. "Well, it had better get unlocked mighty quick then, 'fore I sail in. That's all I got to say."

"Be firm, Jack, you're a-doin' splendid," encouraged Mrs. Evans.

"It'll stay locked," repeated Mr. Nitschkan slowly and impressively, "until you promise me that onct an' fer all you're done with this gipsyin' that's made you the talk of the camp."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Mrs. Nitschkan turned suddenly and gazed at her lord and master, with shrewd and twinkling eyes.

"Who's in there with you Jack?" she asked quickly. "Effie Evans an' Marthy Thomas, I'll bet my head."

Nitschkan ignored the question, and scowled darkly at the blue ridges of the mountains beyond him.

His wife laughed uproariously. "Oh, Effie Evans!" she called breezily through the keyhole. "Wait till you want help in some little game, an' then see where you're at! Is old fat pillow of a Landvetter in there, too? 'Course; I kin smell the coffee. An' dear little Marthy!" she lisped affectedly. "Here Bob, boy!" turning to her son, "get the axe offen Jerry an' Mommie'll break the door."

Mr. Nitschkan turned apprehensively to the council about the stove.

"Tell her," commanded Mrs. Evans, with a pale smile of triumph, "that if she does, it'll be the winter talk in the camp, how you turned her out. Stand pat now, Jack, an' you've got her."

"Folks won't be talkin' of nothin' else all winter, Sadie, if you break that door in," admonished her husband, returning to the window. "They'll say I turned you off."

"That's true enough," acquiesced Sadie, pausing in her operations. This sweet reasonableness on her part caused the ladies about the stove to exchange alarmed glances. "Well, Bob," with what was apparently a sigh of capitulation, "I guess there ain't nothin' fer you

THE NEW MISSIONER

an' me to do but camp in the yard. Get to work an' we'll unload the burros."

"Come away from that window, Jack, an' don't take no notice of her," adjured Mrs. Evans, who had watched with growing uneasiness Nitschkan's increasing interest in the unpacking going on without.

But he was deaf to admonitions. "Lord! she's got a good bear's skin, an' some mighty nice lookin' venison."

"Ain't that jus' like a man, an' after all we done fer him, too!" Mrs. Thomas sunk her voice to a disgusted whisper. "We jus' got to get him away from there."

"Jack, remember what you been through," she pleaded, her hand upon his arm.

"I sure got to show her I'm master here," he said firmly, but as though repeating a lesson which had lost its first, fresh significance. "That's what I got to do."

"You bet you have, Jack," urged the ladies.

"Oh, Jack, Jack," called Sadie's voice outside. "I seen the Weeks boys in North Park an' they told me how they got even at last with the Thompson tribe. It would make a kiote laugh to hear tell of it."

A slow grin overspread Mr. Nitschkan's face. "Did you hear that?" he asked the council. "The Weekses have got even at last with them Thompsons. Gosh! I'd like to know how!"

"Say, Jack, come to the window and see this mess of trout. Bob, boy, build Mommie a fire, an' she'll get some of 'em ready now. Here!" The rollicking, contagious laughter echoed without, as she held up a fish

CHAPTER TWENTY

for her husband's inspection. The sunlight fell upon its speckled sides, and as Sadie drew out the sedgy grass with which it was stuffed, Nitschkan sighed audibly:

"Nice, fresh trout, an' Sadie kin fry 'em to a turn," he muttered wistfully.

"Now, Jack, you want to be firm," reminded Mrs. Thomas. "You don't want to be led away from your duty by no such vanities as trout an' venison."

Deaf to her words, he edged nearer the window. "She's got somethin' in a handkercher," in a tense whisper.

Seductively near drew Mrs. Nitschkan.

"Jack, Jack," holding up some objects tied in a red bandana handkerchief. "Oh, Jack!" she teased. "You'd give them pop eyes of yourn to know what I got in here. Look,"—untying the knots of the handkerchief and holding up three or four gleaming nuggets in her hand,—“what do you think of this? Free gold, Jack, free gold! An' this nice little piece of peacock!”

Mr. Nitschkan breathed hard. "Who passed 'em along to you, Sadie?" he asked with an attempt at carelessness.

"Ol' Mr. Rock give 'em to me," she laughed. "I staked out a nice little claim or so, Jack, an' posted my notice all right, you bet."

"Hand 'em up, Sadie, to let me see," Nitschkan stretched out itching fingers, "or wait—wait till I unbar the door."

He tore at the lock. "Come on in, Sadie," as the

THE NEW MISSIONER

door swung back. "The—the girls"—becoming aware of his advisers in the background—"the girls is here to welcome you." Then he fled.

Cornered, routed, but defiant, the council stood. The guard might die; but there was "no surrender" written on every line of the firm little face of Mrs. Evans as she stood with folded arms, facing her friend.

Mrs. Landvetter, glancing up from the depths of her rocking chair, went on with her knitting; Mrs. Thomas, on the contrary, bustled about with a busy show of occupation.

"I'll pour you a steamin' cup of coffee this minute, Sadie. Mis' Landvetter, will you pass me the cream jug," she babbled, and then encountering Mrs. Nitschkan's glance, she sank down upon a stool and began to weep.

The mountain woman stood in the doorway, her head lowered, her right arm with its tightened fist swinging back and forth by her side. All the easy good nature had vanished from her face.

"Where's my kids, Effie Evans?" Her voice was hoarse.

"They're to my house, Sadie Nitschkan," laconically, coolly.

"What fer?" like the shot of a pistol.

"To keep 'em out of the way while we got Jack to scare you a spell."

The pathos of a betrayed trust was in Mrs. Nitschkan's eyes. "I'm a-goin' to drive you all outen here in about a minute," slowly rolling up her sleeves, "with

CHAPTER TWENTY

some marks on you that you didn't have when you come; but first, I'm going to know what you done it for. You an' me, Effie Evans, has hung together for ten years. Your wits and my fists has made us the leaders of society in Zenith, an' up to a minute ago I'd 'a' done up anybody that'd say you wasn't a white woman."

The tiny beads of sweat were standing out on Mrs. Evans's brow; but her eyes never wavered from the other woman's face.

"I couldn't stand your kids, Sadie Nitschkan; two months an' more of 'em has drove me wild!"

"My kids!" with infinite surprise. "Why, they's no better behaved young ones anywhere."

Mrs. Thomas suddenly ceased her convulsive sobbing. "Supposin', Sadie Nitschkan," she cried. "Supposin' you had to look after Mis' Evans's, or Mis' Landvetter's kids fer two or three months?"

A faint smile twinkled in Mrs. Nitschkan's eyes. "Oh, Marthy," she mocked, "ask me somep'n easy. Why, I'd 'a' broke their heads, that's what I'd 'a' done. But say, my children wasn't that bad? Speak up, Landvetter; they wasn't as bad as the Thomas or Evans kids now, was they?"

"Dey vas vorse," affirmed Mrs. Landvetter. "Ten t'ousand times vorse as de Thomases or Effenses. Mein vas goot."

Mrs. Nitschkan fell against the door, the tears trickling down her cheeks, her laughter ringing through the cabin. "It's all right, girls," buoyantly, boisterously,

THE NEW MISSIONER

and accepting the olive branch of a cup of tea which Mrs. Thomas made haste to offer. "We'll let bygones be bygones."

Then with the elaborate courtesy usual from the victorious general to his defeated opponents: "You girls must 'a' done slick work to get Jack to act like he done; but where you slipped up, women dear, was in miscalculatin' the heart of man."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MRS. NITSCHKAN spent the entire day after her return in various household activities; but toward evening she decided to call upon the Black Pearl, who for some reason had not been among those to bid her welcome during the day. So, her curiosity aroused, she betook herself to the O'Brien cottage soon after supper.

Involuntarily she paused at the gate, struck by something indescribably neglected and forlorn in the air of the whole place. The flowers drooped dustily in the garden; the door, usually so hospitably open, was barred; the blinds were drawn before the closed windows.

The gipsy considered a moment or two, and then curiosity getting the better of her, she unlatched the little white gate and walked up the path with its glaring, scentless border of scarlet geraniums and yellow zinnias. She knocked loudly once or twice, and failing to elicit an answer, forced an entrance at the kitchen door. Here a sight met her eyes which caused her to raise her hands with a loud "Gosh a'mighty!"

The room was in appalling disorder. A cloth had been half dragged from the table scattered with food, while the floor was covered with pots, pans and broken dishes. After one comprehensive glance, Mrs. Nitschkan made her way to an inner room. There she stood on the threshold peering about her until her eyes became

THE NEW MISSIONER

accustomed to the darkness. Then she dimly discerned a black, huddled shape on the bed, and her gaze was caught and held by the smouldering, sullen fire of two dark eyes.

"Pearl?" she asked uncertainly.

The woman on the bed did not answer, only gazed at her in silence.

"Pearl, air you sick?"

No answer.

Mrs. Nitschkan threw the windows wide, and then bent over her friend.

"Now, Pearl, you speak up. What's the matter? Air you sick?"

"I'm a-goin' to kill him," whispered the woman on the bed. "He beat me last night, an' he wasn't jealous. He come home with all the devils in hell in his face. When I set him out his supper he threw the vittles all over the place, an' said it wasn't fit fer dogs to eat; an' then he beat me."

"Gosh a'mighty! An' you the best cook in the camp! He must 'a' been crazy drunk," exclaimed Mrs. Nitschkan indignantly.

"He wasn't drunk an' he wasn't jealous. He wasn't jealous, an' he beat me, *me*," she raised herself with difficulty in the bed, and lifted her stag-like head superbly.

"Air you hurt, Pearl?" anxiously.

"Am I hurt? Am I hurt? Oh, that a-way. Yes, I guess so. Come to think of it, there ain't a inch on me that don't ache. I guess none of my bones is broke,

CHAPTER TWENTY - ONE

though. But he'll get it." She half drew her hand from under the pillow, disclosing the sharp, keen edge of steel. "That's the medicine he's a-goin' to get. I'm a-goin' to knife him, sure."

"Now, Pearl," remonstrated Mrs. Nitschkan severely, "that ain't no way to talk. You're all right to get even with him, but you mustn't forget a thing or two. Us ladies here in Zenith has overlooked your past 'cause you're a decent married woman now, with a ring on your finger, an' a certificate framed on the wall. Now you go to knifin' him an' it'll be a disgrace to the whole camp. What I say, an' what I always says in such cases is, 'get even with him, an' get even with him good; but for the Lord's sake, do it ladylike.' Heave skillets an' stove lids at him all you're a mind to; but throw that knife away."

The Pearl looked at her a moment or two with sullen, contemptuous eyes. "Shut up," she commanded, "I'm tired of hearin' you talk."

"Here, here," admonished Mrs. Nitschkan. "Now I'll hustle around and make you a good, strong cup of coffee. There's nothin' like it fer soul an' body. You'll feel better then. Then we'll get your clothes off, an' a nightgown on, an' we'll see where you're hurted."

"Where I'm hurted?" repeated Pearl, her vague eyes more veiled, more tragically mysterious than ever. "I'm hurted so deep that you can't find it, Sadie Nitschkan."

"Aw, come now, we'll have you all right in a jiffy, an' Shock a-hangin' 'round cryin' over you, an' beatin'

THE NEW MISSIONER

his chest in that crazy French way of his'n. Now you lay still an' I'll heat up some water."

She hustled about making a fire, preparing coffee and putting the place in order, when her attention was suddenly arrested by the sound of flying footsteps on the path outside. Then a thunderous knocking, and before she could reach the door, it was burst open, and a white-faced boy stuttered on the threshold: "Mis' O'Brien, Mis' O'Brien, Bob Flick's shot Shock up at Johnson's an' he wants you quick."

The Pearl had leaped to her feet, casting her knife from her, and before Sadie Nitschkan could reach her she was flying up the mountain road.

A tiny crescent moon was swinging far up in the pale sky. On the platform before the saloon was a black group of men, who made way for the Pearl as she darted through them. The doctor was bending over Jacques, who lay in an open space where the air might reach him. The Pearl dropped beside him, her face to his for a moment, and then she lifted him to her heart.

"Shock, Shock," she moaned.

"Pearl," he whispered, his accent more marked than ever, "it wasn't the vittles. I heard straight that Flick was after you, an' I was jealous mad. I tried to get him first; but he pulled his gun too quick for me."

"Oh, Shock! I never cared for nobody really but you."

A faint reflection of his charming smile flickered over his face. "I know it," he said. "You—you always talked about being free, Pearl. I guess you're free at

CHAPTER TWENTY - ONE

last." He smiled again and then lay heavily on her heart.

For a moment while she held him closely to her breast, her eyes showed some ecstatic illumination, as if she had followed him to the vast and illimitable spaces her spirit craved. Then the shackles of that desolate semblance of reality which she knew as life fell about her again.

"Free!" she cried in the voice of one who faces the terrible nemesis of a granted desire. "Free!" her anguished eyes challenged the grave group of men about her. "There ain't no such damned word fer a woman that kin love."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

MADE aware of the tragedy which had occurred in the village by various swift-footed messengers, who showed the usual alacrity of swift-footed messengers in purveying evil tidings, Frances had twice during the night been to the O'Brien cottage; but the Black Pearl had persistently refused to see her, and had had conveyed to her in no uncertain terms that she had no desire to profit by any of the stock of comfort or consolation that Frances, or any other spiritual adviser might have on hand.

The following morning the Missionary sat in her doorway, her head bent over some sewing and her face sad and troubled. The circumstance of O'Brien's death had shocked her indescribably and it continued to occupy her thoughts to such an extent that she was almost oblivious of Angel, who had paid Frances one of her rare visits that morning, and, after a cursory and indifferent survey of the cabin and its occupant, had betaken herself to a tree, and now sat perched on a bough of one of the quivering aspens near the door. The golden leaves fluttered restlessly about her or floated dreamily through the sun-warmed November air.

A sad-faced monkey with the world-weariness of ages in its eyes, gibbered and chattered on a branch above her or occupied itself sufficiently in frightening, with

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

sly malice, the bluejays and magpies which exchanged raucous comments on its behaviour.

Presently Angel slid down the tree to the infinite detriment of her frock, a consideration which never suggested itself to her, and seated herself beside Frances, as if, for once in a way, she felt the need of human companionship. This was somewhat surprising, as, being a person of infinite resource herself, she depended on no one for entertainment or amusement.

"I'd rather hear squirrels and birds talk dan people," she finally announced.

"Squirrels and birds can't talk," said Frances abstractedly.

"Dey can too," affirmed Angel, with placid assurance. "Dat's all you know. Dey tell me funny things. So do Hurry-Scurry," pointing to her monkey. She appeared to meditate a few moments. "I went into the woods an' heard Mis' O'Brien talk. She talks sis way: 'I'm awful sorry, honest I am, Bob; but I couldn't go.'"

Frances could not repress the start which was involuntary with her, at any of Angel's impersonations, they were so curiously life-like. You had but to shut your eyes to see the Black Pearl standing before you; for her soft, sliding voice was very perfectly reproduced by the child.

Angel, flattered as ever by spontaneous appreciation, whenever she chose to exhibit her gifts, prepared to further dazzle her audience. "An' Bob Flick say sis way:

THE NEW MISSIONER

“ ‘ I always wanted you, Pearl. I’d a stole an’ lied, an’ fought for you, too. See? Will you come down the trail wif me next Thursday? ’ ”

“ I told Herries, an’ he laughed sis way: ‘ Ho, ho, ho!’ ”

Herries’s harsh laughter, more bitter, more sardonic than ever, rang from her lips.

Frances shivered. “ Don’t, Angel,” she cried sharply. “ It sounds horrible. Where did you hear such gibberish? Has someone been teaching you a play? ”

But Angel only smiled after her own inscrutable fashion, and dragging White Puppy toward her, began to instruct him in the painful act of standing on his hind legs.

From time to time during the day, the child’s words recurred to Frances and she found herself pondering over them, vaguely troubled and distressed by them, and yet, failing to attach any definite meaning to Angel’s disjointed phrases.

In the afternoon Carrothers stopped at the cabin door. He spoke at once of the village tragedy, and seemed rather troubled over it in a vague and indecisive way, and at the same time rather self-congratulatory in an equally vague and indecisive way that he was not of that breed of men to whom violent passions brought violent reckonings.

“ Have you been able to see our sister—I mean the erring woman who is responsible for this tragedy? ” he asked Frances.

“ No.” She shook her head.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"I have," importance and resentment struggling for mastery. "She is more hardened than I could have believed." A flush rose on his cheek. "I—I was treated with contumely."

Frances's lips curved in a faint, ironic smile. She could well imagine it.

"It's a solemn thing to think of the state of such souls." But his tone was mollified; the swift vision of retribution was evidently comforting. "And, oh, Missioner, I saw Mr. Herries a few moments this afternoon and was struck by his manner and appearance. What ails him?"

"Mr. Herries?" Frances lifted her head quickly. "Is he ill? Why, he would surely have let me know!"

"He didn't seem ill," explained Carrothers conscientiously. "He seemed to be labouring with some distress of mind which he tried, I thought, to hide from me."

Frances rolled up her work. "I think, if you will excuse me," she said, rising, "I will go up to his cabin and see if he is ill or in trouble. He may need me—or, wait——"

She ran inside and fetched the little whistle which Herries had given her long ago. Twice she blew on it, and then, shading her eyes with her hand, peered curiously up the trail to the old Scotchman's cabin; but he did not appear in the doorway and hasten down the hill as was his wont when she thus summoned him.

Really worried now, she lost no time in climbing the hill to his hut. The door stood open, swinging back and forth on its hinges. Within, the room was disorderly;

THE NEW MISSIONER

the fire out in the stove, and there were no traces of any food having been prepared that day.

Frances, feeling more puzzled than ever, pencilled a little note and leaving it on the table, closed the door behind her and retraced her steps homeward. There seemed, for the moment, nothing else to do; but she could not rid herself of the feeling of apprehension and worry; and when Garvin sat in her little living room that evening she confided her feeling to him. He attributed this entirely to the shock she had suffered the night before, and its corresponding effect on her nerves.

"The old man is all right," he assured her, "but I will go up to his shanty after I leave you, and if he is not there, I will either look him up myself or have someone else do so. There, will that satisfy you? Believe me, nothing can happen to Herries."

"I know I'm foolish," she said deprecatingly, "but——"

"Ah, Missioner," he besought, using that term as playfully as always, and yet speaking with real earnestness, "forget Herries, forget this ugly affair of the O'Briens, forget all these people who come and make demands on you, and give me this evening. Think only of me and of yourself."

She smiled at him, that delightful smile which always struck one afresh with its tenderness and charm.

"You have been hard on me since my friends went away," drawing his chair near to her and taking her hands closely in his. "You have scarcely given me a minute, and you're always ready to give any old tramp

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

that wants it, all the minutes he or she may ask; and no one craves your minutes as I do, Frances, or prizes them half so much." His voice fell into deep and tender intonations. "Ah, Frances, I never knew any woman like you—I've always known the other kind—and a new life has begun for me. Why, life, my life, that I thought about lived, is new and fresh through my love for you. I can't understand it. It's the most wonderful transforming and renewing of energy that ever happened. A few months ago I was tired, cynical; life was half, or perhaps more than half lived, and it did not matter, for it held nothing that I really cared for. I was conscious, fully conscious, of the power that was in my hands through my money, and to save myself, I couldn't care a rap about it. There was nothing it could buy me that I really wanted. And then I met you. I loved you." He laid his cheek against her hands folded in his. "I loved you from the first; and I'm young again. Why, it's the fate of a god!" His face was touched with a pale and glowing enthusiasm. "I'm young, ambitious, the world's a world of illusions. I believe in good because I believe in you. I have experience, great wealth, revived interest. What may I not do now, Frances!" His voice thrilled with triumphant rapture.

His words lifted her into the very heart of the splendid worlds; the ivory gates swung wide; but on those fair sun-lighted shores she became suddenly conscious of the menacing surf of a great ocean, the ocean of pain, and she seemed to hear through the pleasing

THE NEW MISSIONER

of all delicate and harmonious sounds the cries of the shipwrecked.

"You do love me, Frances? You will marry me?" His words came to her as from far away, and muffled by the roar of the mighty sea.

And now the delicate and harmonious sounds swelled also to an ocean, and between the roar of the opposing surges, the surges of the ocean of pain and the ocean of joy, she became bewildered and confused beyond speech.

She struggled to her feet; he saw that her face was deadly white, and she pressed her hands to her eyes.

"To-morrow," she whispered, pleadingly. "I—I can't——"

"You are tired out," he murmured. "These merciless people. They draw and draw and draw on you. Well, we'll put a stop to that. I am going now, and you are to rest, Frances, to take a long rest and let no one disturb you. Will you promise me that?"

She nodded.

"And I will not come, I promise you, before to-morrow evening. No, that is so long—to-morrow afternoon."

She smiled faintly. "To-morrow afternoon."

But in spite of her promise, she rested but little that night, for on the golden sands of all her splendid worlds there still beat the low, terrible surges of the ocean of pain, and through crowding and glorious visions, she saw the face of Herries turned to her and he, who never asked, besought help and comfort.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Finding it impossible to sleep, she arose very early and made her way up to the old man's cabin, and there, to her relief, she found him. The light was just glimmering over the hills as she threw wider the half open door. He sat alone, in the shadows, his head sunk on his breast. His face had sharpened visibly, the outline more cameo-like than ever, and his skin had acquired a strange, blue pallor; the bitter lines about the mouth had also deepened perceptibly.

"Mr. Herries," cried Frances from the doorway; but he looked at her without response, looked at her unflinchingly, and yet, as if she were but another of the many phantoms of the night come to mock him. She went forward and kneeling beside him, took in hers his cold hands. "Mr. Herries," she implored, "what is it?"

He looked at her a few minutes in silence.

"It was I—I who killed O'Brien," he muttered at last. "I saw Bob Flick and the Pearl meeting day after day. I sent Angel into the pines to listen to them—I went myself—I told O'Brien—I knew how mad and jealous he was, but I told him."

Frances shrank from him, her face white. "You told him!" she whispered. "You told him! Why?"

"God knows why—I persuaded myself that he ought to know, that it was right that I should tell him; but I know now that it was the devil in me. I'd got so that I couldn't believe in God or man, and the black malice in my heart had to take shape and strike; but I believed in you, Missioner, I believed in you and I'd made up

THE NEW MISSIONER

my mind to come to you before I spoke to O'Brien. Then I looked through your window, and I saw you sitting there with Garvin, with a smile on your lips and a bunch of roses, red roses on your breast—and I turned away. Why should I spoil your happiness?"

Frances crouched, almost cringed on the floor beside him in silence.

"Aye, shrink from me," he cried. "You're right. I ask no forgiveness."

"Forgiveness! Forgiveness!" she cried poignantly. "Oh, can you ever forgive me?" She got to her feet, a curious blank, almost blind look in her eyes, and drifted through the door. Out on the hillside, she walked on and on, indifferent, unconscious of the direction she took, until wearied, she sank down beneath a tree and sat there for a long time, brooding, motionless. At last she arose and walked, though wearily, on up the hill.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

IT was one of those soft, dull, dim days when the grey sky seems to melt by imperceptible gradations into a grey and toneless earth. November in the mountains.

The afternoon was at hand when Garvin would seek his answer, and Frances was far from her cabin. Ever since she had left Herries she had wandered on up the trails through mists, alone in a great, unreal world. It was as if the vast and solitary mountains demanded seclusion for some high communion, and before exhibiting themselves in the clear sunlight of self-revelation, withdrew for a period of mysterious meditation. The dimmed distances were blue, a smoke-like and blurred blue; the leafless branches interlaced their fine criss-cross of twigs against this unsubstantial background, the pines were strong, green masses, the green acquiring new depth and vividness from the mist-sea on which they floated.

A fine rain fell; but Frances ignored it, and walked on until she reached a level plateau known to her, and covered with low, twisted, wind-bent pines. There she stopped suddenly, for sitting on a great, wet rock was the Black Pearl.

Unconscious of Frances's approach, she sat gazing down at the clouds which lay between her and the valley. Her gown was open at the throat as if she had

THE NEW MISSIONER

pulled it apart for more air; her burnt-umber hair was almost slipping down her back; there were sagging pouches of loose skin under her eyes and her firm, rounded chin.

She remained oblivious of the Missionary's approach until Frances touched her lightly on the arm. Then she turned with a quick frown, "Oh," with dull petulance; "it's you, Missioner."

"Yes." Frances sat down on the rock beside her and passed her hand over the Pearl's hair and shoulders: "Why, Mrs. O'Brien, how long have you been sitting here? Your hair is soaking wet and so is your dress."

"Oh, yes—it's been wet, I suppose," impatiently. "What's the difference? Say, Missioner," clasping her hands around her knees and drawing her feet further up on the rocks. "It's an awful thing to think, ain't it? I ain't never had any education except what I picked up from the boys, and I don't suppose I know much; but I always been a-thinkin' an' a-studyin' about things. Now take the ladies down there in Zenith. They're content managin' their own affairs and other people's. They don't care for anything that don't concern their eatin' and drinkin', their kids an' their husbands; but if you once get to studyin' about life, Missioner, you can't stop. You got to go on thinkin', an' it haunts you night an' day. You can't get away from it; it's like a great wheel that's always a-turnin', an' you see the awful misery, jus' sufferin', sufferin' everywhere. An' people talk an' tell you the Lord loves 'em's the reason

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

he's torturin' their souls an' bodies. An' you know it's lies, lies. God, Missioner! I feel every minute like I got to fling myself off these rocks."

In her little cabin, Garvin was waiting for her answer, even now. This was the one swift thought that flashed across Frances Benson's mind. This was the day of which she had dreamed, the birthday of her life, a day of vast and sunlighted spaces, of peacock thrones and gold and purple decorations; down the hill, love, home, companionship awaited her, and her whole spent being longed for them; but the natural impulse to help, enforced and strengthened by years of training, asserted itself imperatively. She did not think of setting another season for the Pearl's consolation. The peacock thrones, the birthday celebration must wait. The softness faded from her eyes, the weary lines from her face. Her figure involuntarily straightened itself. She was a soldier on guard now, and this was the firing line.

Without conscious thought, but by mere intuitive perception of the only way to meet the situation, she threw herself into the other woman's mood.

"Pearl, it's a wheel, as you say, a great wheel that's always turning and crushing the lives of men and women and little children. And it's crueller than death and the grave, unless you see it right. I can't see it right, either, just now, Pearl," the cry came from her soul; "but,"—the old mystic glow in her eyes, "I know it, even if I can't see it. It's all love and beauty."

The haggard woman twitched her shoulders restlessly from Frances's encircling arm. "I know," with a con-

THE NEW MISSIONER

temptuous curl of the lip, "that's what Ethel's been a-tellin' me. Ethel with her Salvation Army talk! Say, Missioner," breaking away from the thread of her own despairing musings for a moment and speaking with earnestness and appreciation: "You certainly done the white thing by Ethel. She was tellin' me the other day how she stole that money from the Army, an' how you comforted her an' give her the cash out of your own pocket to pay it. Do you think if I didn't know how you done things like that, that I'd sit here an' listen to you talk? I've heard too much talk in my life. An' that Lunger Preacher—Carrothers—he come to me an' handed out somethin' about repentin', I believe, an' some thief or other on the cross. I didn't pay much attention to him; I ain't no thief. It's all of a piece with what the Padre used to tell me down in the desert, an' it's all lies. There ain't no justice." She dropped her head on her knees and the long, wet strands of her hair fell about her.

For a moment Frances turned her puzzled gaze down into the valley of clouds, then lifted them to the grey, bending, unsubstantial skies. Into her brooding eyes there flashed a sudden illumination like the gleam of fire on steel.

"Pearl," she cried, and her face was stern, "don't you say that! You're a living proof that there is justice. Preacher comes to you, Ethel comes to you, I come, offering what comfort we can, and we sit and talk to you and every word we say falls on deaf ears. Why? Because what you sow you reap; and you've sowed hell,

CHAPTER TWENTY - THREE

Pearl, and you've got to reap it. You can't get out of prison till you've paid the last farthing, and it's no use trying. You can't break the bars and crawl out, paying fifty cents on the dollar; it's dollar for dollar; because it's justice.

"What have you been doing all your life, Pearl? You've been sowing the wind. The Black Pearl! That's what they've called you, and that's what you've been, and you've dragged plenty down with you. But you haven't been happy because you can think, and what has been the misery of your life is going to be the thing that will save you. You're black, but you're a pearl still, and pearl means white. You've got to see it that way. You've been throwing dice with sin all your life, and sin's let you win; but it's taking its wages now, and the wages is death."

The Pearl had lifted her head, and now she sat staring at the stern-voiced Missionary. "Yes," she nodded, "its wages has sure been death."

"But, Pearl," the voice thrilled with tenderness, "you've suffered enough to pay your debts to sin; now turn around and pay yourself."

"To myself? Debts to me?"

"Yes. The biggest debt you owe is to yourself, to the white side of you, the side that can think; for do not dream that you can ever get out of paying those debts. You can't. It isn't any use trying."

"God! If I ain't paid for my sins, I'd like to know who has!" It was an exceeding bitter cry.

"Then leave them." The Missionary's tone was a

THE NEW MISSIONER

command. "Leave them and begin to see yourself as white, not black."

The Pearl clutched Frances's arm tensely, her face broke up, rivers of tears poured from her eyes. "Them's the only words that's reached me. There wasn't a mite of comfort for me in anything the others said, not a mite. But," and her face fell, "it's all right to tell me that black's to turn around and be white; but how am I goin' to do it?"

"Don't you suppose," asked Frances, "that there are others in the world just as bad and just as suffering as you? Isn't it true that you could understand and help those that have lived the same life that you have, and have had the same things to meet?"

"I might try," said Pearl, a new light in her eyes; "but it would be easier to die."

"Yes; but you've got to live. There's justice, justice at the heart of the universe, and you've got to pay the debt to yourself."

"Is it true?" she still doubted. "It sounds like sense to me; it's kind o' plain; but is it true?"

"Yes, it's true, and I'll never leave you, Pearl, till I prove it to you."

"You swear that?" again clutching her.

"Yes, I swear it."

The Pearl stood up. "I kin breathe now," she said. "I tell you what, Missioner, I ain't one to do anything half-hearted. If there's any white to me I'm goin' to find it. Where are you goin'?" as Frances rose from the rock and took a step or two forward.

CHAPTER TWENTY - THREE

“Further up the trail. There’s something in my mind that I want to think out, so I’m going to say good-bye now to the white Pearl.”

They parted, the trail Frances followed leading further on up toward the summit of the mountain. It seemed more wet and slippery than before and she stumbled once or twice and fell on her knees. Mechanically she brushed off her skirt and went on.

It was not until she reached timber line that she paused. Above her were the great, bare rocks and boulders, and crowning them the sharp, cold peaks.

Here the fine rain had ceased to fall. The sky, although still a dense grey, seemed no longer to blend with the mists and to bend so near that one might touch it. It was further away, quite far above even the peaks, and had begun to change like a faintly tinted opal, as if behind its dim, opaque density there were gold and flame and blue. For a long time Frances gazed at the still white peaks; then, as her glance travelled downward, she saw Garvin climbing the hill.

“I stopped at the cabin,” he said, when he reached her, “but you were not there, so I came on up, further and further, until I met the Pearl, and she said you had come up this trail. Mercy, what a climb! Why did you run away, Frances?” His eyes were full of a tender reproach. “I couldn’t sit in the cabin and wait for you. I had to find you. Why, last night, I couldn’t sleep. I kicked the logs together on my library hearth, and I sat there all night—thinking. I planned the journeys we’d take together all over the world; the palaces and

THE NEW MISSIONER

the gardens and the pictures we'd see and buy. Why, I even thought of the jewels I'm going to give you, you wonderful, dark, sweet Frances—rubies, quarts of them. There will be mighty few women in this country that can have any more. Oh, Frances, what a life we shall have; for you are going to marry me, aren't you?"

It was the woman who looked at him, love in the deeps of her eyes; it was a soldier on the firing line who answered him:

"No."

"No," he echoed, his face paling. "Why—why——!"

"No," she hurried, "I'm not going to marry you. I know it isn't fair to you. I shouldn't have let things go on as they have. I cannot blame myself enough, and I'm going to pay for it," with a bitter smile; "but—but—I dare not yield to this temptation."

At these conventional words he lifted his hands and brought them down with clenched fists, an impotent, impatient, despairing gesture.

"The same old thing! The same old priestly advice, with which women love to sear and shrivel their lives. Frances," with sudden determination, "do you like me well enough to think that you could be happy with me?"

She nodded mutely. There was anguish in her dark eyes.

"I thought so," he affirmed triumphantly. "You know that you love me. Reason enough to give me up. Was there ever a woman with a touch of the religious temperament who didn't sacrifice herself and everyone

CHAPTER TWENTY - THREE

else? Renunciation, I believe they call it. Renunciation with every letter a capital. Frances, I'm not going to be given up. Do not dream it."

Their eyes met, clashed; but neither wavered.

"You are," she answered, "for you cannot hold me. I do love you——"

"You love me, but you won't marry me," he laughed impatiently. "It's the loneliness of your life," he murmured presently, as if analysing to himself the causes of her decision, "the effect of celibacy on a nature never intended for it. Well, Frances, since you are determined to be a missionary, why not be one to me?"

"Always, when you need me," steadily, sincerely.

"Oh, that terrible, monkish stigmata on the brain!" he cried. "The madness, the fanaticism, the cruelty of the religious temperament! This damnable Renunciation with a capital R! And you would sacrifice both you and myself to a crazy, egotistic belief that you are divinely appointed to help a lot of sordid, worthless, good-for-nothing people? Tell me, have you ever had any gratitude from them? How many have you really helped?"

"Those are the questions that I used to ask myself in the days when I tried to help people," she smiled in sad derision, "and it seemed to me that I never helped them. I usually harmed them. And no matter how hard I worked, the results were always so meagre. And I would get so discouraged and disheartened! And then, one day, I cannot tell how nor why, I knew all at once that it would be that way just as long as I tried to help

THE NEW MISSIONER

them. I saw that I had no right to try and guide and direct people. Everyone has a right to choose his own path, no matter what it is, or where it leads. So I just loved them; and in that way, Walter, I learned the great secret of life—love. Not to question or direct, but just give love and sympathy, and tolerance—that is all we need.” She paused and looked up the mountain.

His glance followed hers and he saw a long, rough steep, great pink rocks and desolate ice-peaks swept always by the mighty, rushing winds; but she gazed out upon the Via Mystica, a weary and toilsome road, but guarded always by tall and shadowy angels with healing in their wings.

“If you loved a singer would you ask her to give up her beautiful voice?” she asked abruptly.

“I would neither ask nor wish her to do so, but if she really loved me she would be quite willing.”

Frances shook her head. “Willing!” she cried, “what is ‘willing’ in such a case? If it is a true gift, it is the real part of her, and the only real part. It is her expression. My poor little gift is to love all who suffer, and I couldn’t give it up. It is me.”

He looked at her pityingly. “Ah, Frances, I had not dreamed how you, with your sensitive, impressionable temperament had suffered from the seclusion of these mountains! Dear,” tenderly, “we will go from these gloomy hills, out into the big, sane, laughing world of human interests and activities. There has been too much fasting and prayer in your life, dearest. We’ll cut out all that, thank God! I shall pick you up in

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

a minute and carry you down the hill, close, close to my heart, and we'll catch a train presently and go out to the big world of men and cities. Why, with the powers at our command, we can drape life with colour and beauty. Oh, Frances, won't you see it—the kingdoms of the earth are ours!"

"‘And cinnamon and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and the souls of men.’" She murmured so low that he did not hear her.

"But won't you think of me, Frances? Won't you help me to live, now that I, too, have found the secret of life—which is my love for you? Won't you help me realise my dreams and ambitions? Do they mean nothing to you? You shall have all the playthings you want—hospitals, churches, schools—anything; but I am going into public life. I need your help. Think of the opportunities! Think——"

"I do think. I have thought," she interrupted him passionately. "You have great possessions, and with them are developing great ambitions——" She stopped abruptly, the mental struggle manifest in her face, her eyes; then she rose above the jealous, dominating feminine. "In your brilliant and luxurious life I would be only a husk, a shell of a woman, who would have to be trained into a painstaking knowledge of customs and manners which would never seem to me worth the time and interest I would have to put into them. It—it is not I you need by your side,"—she moistened her white lips,

THE NEW MISSIONER

—"but a young, happy woman, to whom all these observances are as natural as breathing. A young, happy woman with golden hair and a coronet of roses. Oh, Walter," after a brief pause, "fool, crank, fanatic, I may be; but your jewels I couldn't wear. I'd see always white starving faces turned to me. I couldn't decorate your beautiful houses and meet your guests; I'd see stunted, toil-worn hands stretched out to me, and hear the cries of the shipwrecked. Don't you see that my work is me?"

"But the new worlds you talked so much about, the worlds of beauty and colour and thought and imagination," he pleaded.

"I don't belittle them. I love them; but there's a more wonderful reality. Through seeing them, I see far and yet farther horizons. I've got to go on, Walter. I've got to follow life, this vision of life, as I see it myself, not as you would see it for me. I can't help it. I've got to go on."

His face had changed and darkened; his eyes were cold, his mouth bitter.

"I thought you were a woman, capable of love; I find that you are a fanatic, willing to sacrifice everything to an egotistic passion for self-expression."

"It is life, the only true life. Anything else is death," she muttered.

When he left her she stood for a long time gazing out over the mountains. Then she crept down the hill as far as the rock on which she and the Pearl had sat earlier in the day, and huddled close against it. Night,

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

black as ink and broken by the mocking cries of the coyotes, came on, and lay over the earth for many hours. When the dawn came, Frances strove to rise; but her limbs had stiffened. She ached from head to foot, and she seemed to have lost the power and will to move. The pale light gradually deepened, and when the sun at last arose, it sent one dazzling ray straight through the trees, flashing the high command of eternal morning: "Lift up your gates and sing!"

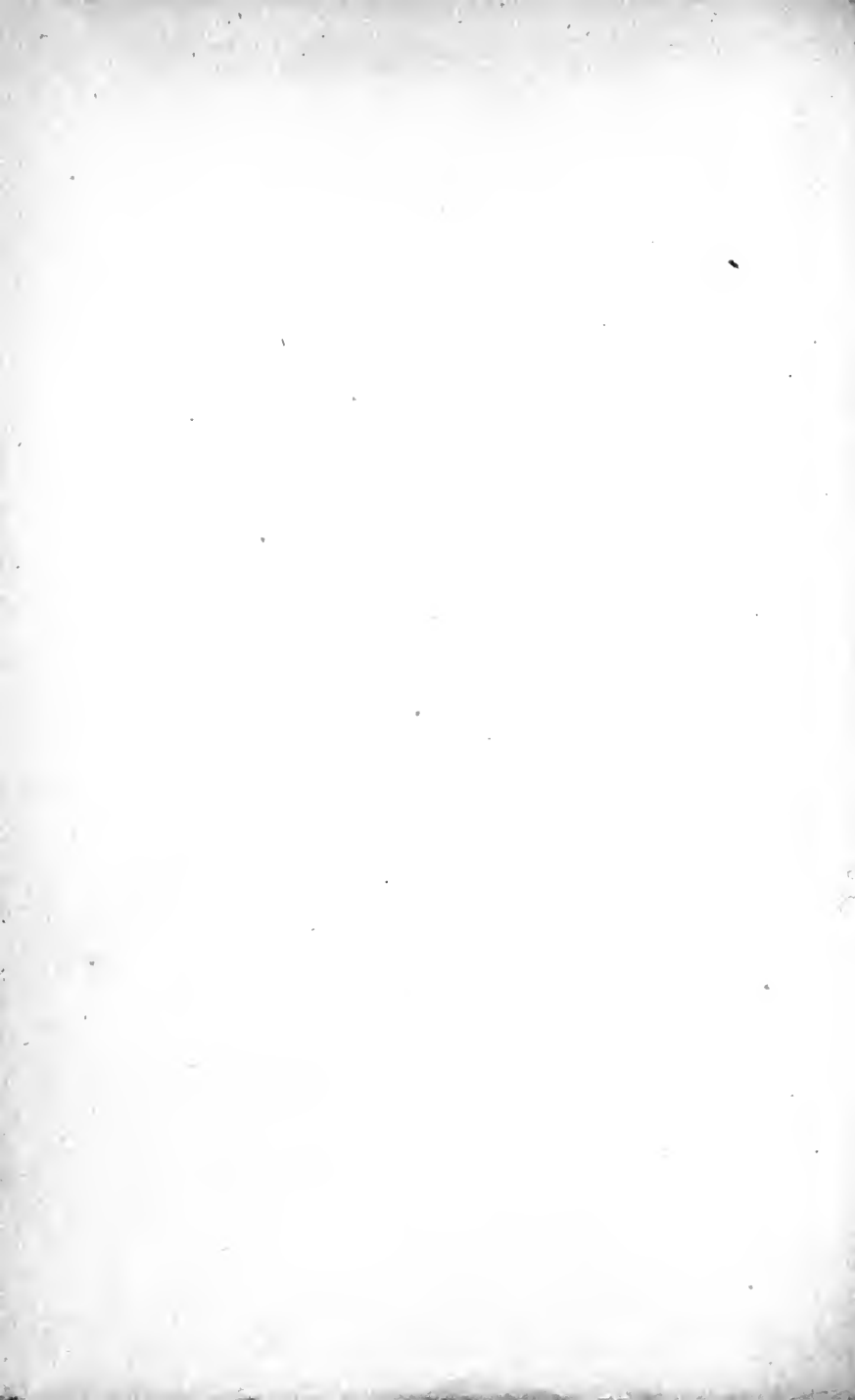
Frances remembered that other morning when, through joy, she had lifted her gates as high as heaven. Now she was crushed beneath those gates; now she had but her soul's heritage—the comfortless—to comfort her. As she thought of them, their weakness and tears seemed to flow toward her, augmenting her strength. With infinite difficulty she struggled to her knees, then to her feet. Her stiffened arms she slowly raised above her head, as if she held aloft the grief of the world. She would lift her gates as high as heaven, and the very soul of her should sing.

THE END









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